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TO LITTLE THIBET

HELEN MARY
BOULNOIS

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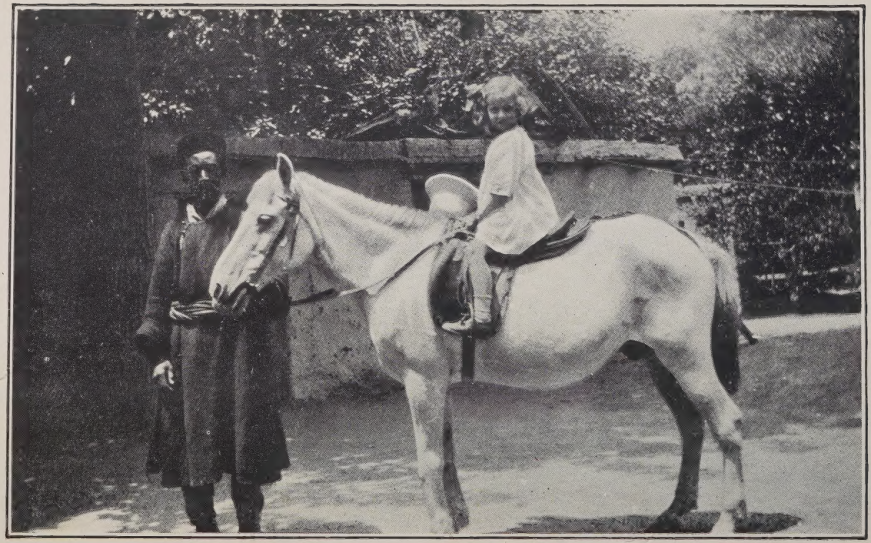
INTO LITTLE THIBET



THE LITTLE GIRL WHO RODE 163 MILES. (ON DROMA.)

INTO LITTLE THIBET

BY

HELEN MARY BOULNOIS

AUTHOR OF
"THE HEALING POWER"
"THE LAW OF BEING"
ETC.

With reproductions of four water-colour and four pencil sketches made on the spot by the Author, also sixteen photographs

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PROLOGUE

It began at Simla. I had tea with a friend.

"You must see my sister if you do go to Kashmir," she said. "She and her husband are both doctors, attached to the Mission at Leh. They are returning next month. You should go with them."

"Where is Leh?" I asked, feigning interest.

"In Little Thibet."

I pricked up my ears. All my life I have longed for Thibet, the Roof of the World.

But it seemed to end at Srinagar. The first thing I did on arriving at that Maidenhead in Heaven was to call on the Mem Sahib. She was charming, but firm.

"You can't come with us. We shall have as much as we can do getting the children there. It is extremely doubtful if you can come in any case. Only twenty-six Permits are given each summer, sixteen to sportsmen. The list is full. You had better see the Assistant Resident immediately."

I pursued him to his study to meet with rebuff.

"Why do you want to go? You can't possibly know what it's like! The journey is awful. You must march, march whatever you feel like, over snow, by precipices, through impossible gorges where the sun scorches. And when you do get to Leh—it's eleven thousand feet up. You can't move without hurting your heart. . . . But I can't send you anyhow," his voice became cheerful. "All the Permits are given out!"

I pressed for just one.

"We can't give more. It's a question of supplies and ponies. Some of the country is absolutely barren. The people go without to find the food. A man came in yesterday and gave an appalling account. . . ."

I sat down in Srinagar to wait, lest perchance a Permit should be returned.

A whole month dragged away. Once more I rushed round to the Mem Sahib.

"I have a pass! A lady has dropped out!"

And suddenly she relented. I had never expected it, for I knew her hands were full.

"Well, after all, perhaps you had better come with us."

The children are Helen, aged five, already riding a pony "for practice," and baby Mary, the blessed thing, only six months old.

"Give auntie a kiss," the Mem Sahib said, as the little girl ran into the garden.

"Shall I come with you to Leh?" I asked her.

"Yes, auntie. Do come to Leh!" And she opened a pair of wide arms.

THE PINK PERMIT

7/22.

PASS

Name, MISS BOULNOIS.

Rank or Occupation.....

Note.—This pass should be shown to the Tehsildar at Kargil. Transport for onward journey will not be supplied otherwise.

Signed,

Assistant Resident in Kashmir for Ladakh.

NAMES OF STAGES.

1.	Srinagar	Ganderbal.	9.	S. Kharbu	Kargil.
2.	Ganderbal	Kangan.	10.	Kargil	Moulbeck.
3.	Kangan	Gund.	11.	Moulbeck	Bot Kharbu.
4.	Gund	Sonamarg.	12.	B. Kharbu	Lamayuru.
5.	Sonamarg	Baltal.	13.	Lamayuru	Nurla.
6.	Baltal	Mattayan.	14.	Nurla	Saspul.
7.	Mattayan	Dras.	15.	Saspul	Nimoo.
8.	Dras	S. Kharbu.	16.	Nimoo	Leh.

INTO LITTLE THIBET

CHAPTER I

Srinagar, June 13th, 8.30 a.m.
Really off!

THE last strap had been pulled. Five house servants instructed each other and pretended to listen to me. Three coolies handed baggage down the garden path to the canal, and justified existence by carrying one small object at a time. Bedding-roll, hold-all, suit-case, umbrella-roll with easel and fishing-rod, side-saddle were heaped on the prow under waterproof sheet. Yes, side-saddle. I have been warned not to take it; but that has happened before.

The pretty little flat-bottomed boat, piled with cushions, light awning overhead, slipped over dark water between house-boats, plied by turbaned men with heart-shaped paddles.

Through the Dal Gate,—an arch, leading from canal to open river, where descending water makes it necessary to creep uphill. On the far side a lady joined me, coming to spend the day at Ganderbal. She heaped upon the cushions, bread, cakes, vegetables and fruit to help on the long journey.

We passed under willows along a narrow stream. Reflections were vivid. Two lambs, nibbling sweet

grass at the water's edge, touched their own black nozzles, above their white woolley selves in the clear mirror beneath them. Morning air blew freshly in our faces. Water-lilies spread green sheets over dark water, hedges were behind them, tall, swaying poplars and peeping distant snows.

Soon we were in the Mar Canal. Dark bridges arched narrow water. Tall, brown houses jutted balconies of fret-work, supported by black, slanting poles. Green trees bulged between them. Odoriferous it was with dripping drains. Naked children, little, brown imps, joyously dipped and even drank the turbid mixture, looking curiously healthy. Hollyhocks threw up graceful bouquets of flowers.

We slipped beneath a small, rounded arch, passed a few more scattered houses, yet more children, and were out on a wide sheet of water, spread with lotus-leaves. A grey heron stood solemnly among them. A brown boat with long, protruding pole cut a vivid foreground to distant snows, growing faint under summer sun. Small yellow water-lilies lifted fastidious heads as if to look at the swift, jewelled flash of kingfishers.

A tiny, brown boy with curly head stared solemnly from a pile of water-lily leaves behind his mother's back. She doubled paddle and her own crouching self on the far projecting prow of her boat in the still water below. Wet fell like silver from her long handle.

"Lady Sahib Ko!" the boatmen shouted, dipping paddles with renewed vigour.

Snow edges of mountains cut through dimness of mist away to the left. Far, tall mountains rose in noble contours to the right, snow-crowned through the rifts. Flat as Holland lies the great Vale of Kashmir surrounded by Switzerland, a wall of mountains, seemingly unbroken. I craned and peered in vain for the outlet that would lead through the Sind Valley to lands beyond.

Into a winding river, willow-hung, where two of our men towed the boat with long rope. Swish, swish, water broke beneath us.

A woman stooped for sticks upon the path beneath her sack-like veil. The child beside her showed a soft, brown, velvet limb through a split in his little shirt. Yellow rag-wort leant off the bank. We crossed the river. The boatmen divided differently. A man, a boy and a wee little chap landed with the rope.

"One and three-quarters," my companion remarked.

The men left with us began singing. It sounded something between a big bee buzzing and a Celtic wail, reminiscent of bag-pipes. Trees overhung the edge, the boy waltzed round them with the rope. Brown roofs of boats next obstructed. They tossed the cord high over them, like a skipping rope, splashing up silvery water.

Tents gleamed white on green grass under trees. Mine among them! I thrilled at the thought of my own little waiting home. Huts in the far distance looked like English thatched cottages.

One and three-quarters were wading, flinging up water with glee. The quarter fell flat with a big splash, struggled up, shirt dripping, with glad shrieks of delight.

Little Helen ran to the water's edge to greet us.

CHAPTER II

June 14th, Ganderbal.
Not off till to-morrow!

"You mustn't talk English!" little Helen commanded, in pale blue kimono, holding up the flap of my tent. "She doesn't understand it."

Choskyid, the children's nurse, brought me a cup of early morning tea, dressed in claret cloth coat with wide skirt, tight fitting leggings and up-turned pointed shoes. A hat, somewhat Napoleonic in brim, edged with astrachan fur, stood away from her ears, whence hung big hoops of pearl and turquoise.

"What do you want?" little Helen demanded. "Water? That's *Chu*. Say *Chu*."

I said *Chu*, and found myself talking Thibetan.

. . . . . .

From my Note-book. Ganderbal.

Boys and men stand thigh-deep in the icy flow of the river, netting loose drift-wood, content to sell their takings at a rupee a maund. High tide occurs several hours after the extreme melting of high snows between eleven and three o'clock every day.

To-day fishing licence opens. House-boats are creeping up the river to join others along the bank.

Our tents are the last on the pleasant lawn. From us to the post-office, nearly a mile away, tents and house-boats follow thickly. People spend long summer weeks in this peaceful spot, leading much the same life as they would by the seaside in England.

Willow trees stand at the edge of the water, cast flickering shade. Wood-pigeons coo. At the back of the sward chinar trees with huge grey trunks, like elephants, point delicate leaves, throw deep and grateful darkness. I am sitting beneath them, while three little girls, baskets on head, dust-coloured rags dropping gracefully over slim shoulders and well-held little busts, stand gazing at me.

Two youngsters were disporting themselves a moment since in pale coffee-coloured skin in the water. Now they look like little gentlemen in hitched-on pyjamas and shirts.

A golden aureole spreads brilliant plumage.

. . . . . .

Little Helen joined me there. I exchanged pen for paint-brush. A small boy, helpless, lame from rickets, crawled over the grass, doubtless sent forth to beg.

Helen was indignant.

" Perhaps he only wants to see the painting," I suggested to appease her.

" May I show it him ? " she asked.

Lifting it carefully off the easel, she ran with it to the little fellow.

The dark child crouched on the grass, sad eyes

unlit. The white child, full of life, bent her golden fluff of hair, earnestly holding out the picture for him to see.

. . . . . .

From my Note-book.

The Tekkidar has just been to see us. A handsome old man in stylishly worn rag sacking, grey beard, huge white turban, and deep, resonant voice. So might Reuben have looked when getting into years. Another man was with him.

They bore each other out. Eighteen ponies shall be forthcoming for our start to-morrow morning, but with difficulty. Coolies are required for field-work, and will not come. But baby must be carried in something between a basket-work cot and a cage, slung on a pole.

The Dr Sahib not only promised backsheesh, but has a deeply coveted government order for rice, wherewith to bribe them. Probably we shall start.

Later we walked to the post-office. Mail had not been sorted. I sat on the high window ledge waiting, looking over rounded, irrigated patches of pale green rice, growing in water. Low white mists gathered above them.

That agile elf, Helen, climbed up beside me, but was hardly perched when she emitted a short howl of joy and precipitated herself to earth. A boy rode a stout, comfortable white cob up a path under big trees.

"Droma!" she cried, was through the gate, the

boy off the pony, and she, reins in hand, securely seated in his place.

Sober old Droma, thirty years old, had arrived to take honourable part in the journey. Returning over the green beside the pony I met a friend.,

"Surely that child is not going too?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, she is going to ride."

"Ride? All the way? Impossible! You have no idea what is before you! Shadeless marches . . ."

Helen, standing high in stirrups, struck Droma with outstretched little hand. Her gentle old friend ambled on beneath her.

"They will kill that child! She never can arrive there. She will die on the way."

. . . . . .

To-morrow we penetrate an outlet, invisible from here. We follow the river.

CHAPTER III

June 15th, Ganderbal to Kangan, 12 miles.

DISTURBED night, odious with mosquitoes and sand-flies. Awakened at five.

The mountain wall far over the vale looked near. Roseate hues touched the snows, ethereal, ephemeral. Trees on the opposite bank, too green at mid-day, were grey, ghostly, unreal. The river, a sheet of liquid silver.

Breakfast at five-thirty, but difficult to swallow.

General scrimmage. Tents tumbling down, ponies sauntering up. Baggage, baths, saddles, tent-ropes, packing-cases lying around in confusion.

"If we are away by seven . . ." the Dr Sahib said.

Helen and I were off at six-thirty. She perfectly happy on a strange horse, only upset because she was not allowed a whip.

A thick-set peasant followed as syce.[1] At first glance we knew he had not much run in him, and never had cause to revise the impression.

Glad was I to be firmly fixed on side-saddle, crossing the green, when two stray horses—one

[1] Groom.

hobbled—and my horse started fighting, rearing on hind legs to do it thoroughly. The antics of the hobbled one were horrible to see. Helen was not in the least upset.

" Your horse is a naughty horse," she observed; " mine is good ! "

Up by the rice fields we went, along a field path under willows. Mountains rose higher as we came beneath their slopes. The river swerved to the right. Following the bend, we were in a long narrow valley. Sun poured down, but there were adorable patches of shade.

Sometimes the view was Italian, then oddly like the Trossachs. Swift streams gushed and rushed, beautiful foliage bent above them. Suddenly we came upon camels browsing under trees, startling in the familiar landscape.

A big bridge solidly crossed the roaring galloping river. I thought of my mother, who, fifty years ago, had villagers out to hold up her pony and breast such torrents. Good to hear wood reverberate beneath the horses' hoofs.

The next mile was hot and seemed very long. Little Helen gave signs of wearying. Only occasionally were there trees. We were too far from the water to feel its cooling breeze. We turned sharply down-hill. The Mem Sahib overtook us, pointed to rocks and trees by the rushing water's edge.

" There's Paghspa at his fire ! " she cried. " The water will be boiling."

The Thibetan cook stood up, straightened his back so his pig-tail ran down it, waved his big spoon.

We slid from our horses into pools of shade.

. . . . . .

From my Note-book. 9.15 *a.m.*
Between Ganderbal and Kangan.

Water is rushing, bubbling down, bringing sweet fresh air from the snows. A ridge of pines points darkly against grey-blue mountain behind it. Before us stretches a rough bit of grassy earth covered with stumpy willows, festooned with trails of white wild roses. Impetuous waters push their own broken paths. Two big trees lean over the torrent among grey boulders. We sit on the very edge of the tumbling stream, drink hot tea, eat bread and butter, cold meat, cold potatoes, cucumber, and cherries.

"This is brunch," the Mem Sahib explains. "Mixture of breakfast and lunch. At Kangan we have tunch, mixture of lunch and tea."

. . . . . .

I suggested waiting till the cool of six-thirty, getting to Kangan at nine-thirty.

"What? When we are up at five next morning?"

They offered to leave me.

I came.

And lo! a cool breeze blew ever brisker as the valley opened and imperceptibly we mounted.

Snow stood sentinel, sent down refreshing sting of electricity. Air was lighter. The Mem Sahib trotted past on Droma, singing.

The faithful nurse never left her charge. Baby's cot swung along on its pole, the little one sleeping within, lulled by swing and steady trot of two stalwart men.

Cross-legged on her pony, whip swinging in hand, Choskyid followed close behind after it.

"How much more stylish she is than we are," I sighed, looking at the upright line of her back, as she rode ahead on native saddle—clean line from thigh to upturned shoes in stirrup. Red peaked hat, turned up with black astrachan, smart against dark blue cloth coat, exactly matching the scarlet line of her saddle-bags. What could she think of me, sitting side-saddle under a frightful solar topee, beneath a green parasol?

Helen translated her passing remark.

"Great Queen," she says, "she means you!" It is an old game, Helen is the little Queen.

Our admiration is reciprocal.

We had to think of names for our horses.

"Perhaps yours is auntie to mine," Helen suggested.

"Or uncle!"

"Yes, he must be uncle. His hair is cut short. We must call him Brown."

"Uncle Brown."

"You mustn't call him uncle! Only teeny tiny little ones do that! You must call him Mr Brown!"

*

CHOSKYID AND BABY.

Her own pony is Rosie Jean Grey.

"Isn't it lovely?" she cried. "We are going to do this every day for days and days."

"For sixteen days."

"Much more than sixteen. For about a hundred. You see, I've been there before and I know."

She does not ask if the path is to the next village. When it splits she points and asks, "Is that the way to Leh?"

So did a Saracen maiden once find her lover.

"*Gilbert! London!*" was all she said, and travelled straight to him.

And so on the road to Leh, did we arrive about noon at a place called Kangan.

CHAPTER IV

Kangan.

A CLEAN little bungalow of barrack-like precision stood on green sward, back from the roaring river. A colonel and his wife had pitched a tent under a big tree with home-like scatter of tables, rugs and chairs.

Pleasant to take possession of a deep cool room with strong tables and chairs, (camp furniture is so rickety,) with native charpoy bed. Very comfortable these are too, braided with two-inch ticking on poles with short legs.

That indefatigable child spent the afternoon riding hobby-horse on the verandah. I sought the shade of a far tree. Something in the vivid air, much more bracing than that of the vale, play of sunshine, roar of river, flit of birds, sent sleep away.

We had tea or tunch on the verandah. Flies swarmed.

" Isn't it beautiful to deady one ? " Helen asked.

" More beautiful to deady them all ! " her father replied.

Grass grew on the roof of the dilapidated, picturesque post-office, crooked beams stuck out.

Across the way the police-station reared itself, a small mud shanty. The wilds were beginning.

A gentle request for a rupee was backed by this paper :—

" We the poor boy of this school are anxious to start reading of English and other knowledges in order to give some light to our hearts so as to distinguish the right for wrong and to be well up in complying with the orders of the officers and visitors.

" You people are merciful and always helping the poor in every possible way, and we hope strongly that your honourable selves for the sake of Lord Almighty accept our humble requests in favouring us any amount as to add the subscription fund of this school to make its future better.

" We the poor boys of this school will always pray for your long life and prosperity. Great God Stetes INS read of one rupee will be favoured Rs. 10s. which is here and into Heaven."

The end was ambiguous. We trust it means in the heavenly account our humble alms may be multiplied by ten.

. . . . . .

June 16th, Kangan to Gund, 13 miles.

Distant roar of water mingled soothingly with Miss Baby's cries when she wakened ere day was grey and claimed immediate attention.

It was our hour for rising.

Helen and I rode forth together, leaving others to cope with morning muddle of scattered baggage.

Coolies were forthcoming, though not till the last moment were we sure of them. A Mohammedan, looking like a study for Judas, talked long and earnestly under high-beaked nose and turban the previous afternoon. But the coolies were there. After all he was no Judas.

Our ponies hoped for home and gleefully turned their heads in the wrong direction. The sturdily-built syce drove them onward.

By the grace of God that wise child remarked :—

"I'm to wear dark glasses, Mummie says."

I thought of mine, poked in the pocket of my sketching-bag, looked—they were not there.

I left her with the syce, returned, found them on the bare table of the room I left, thrust them in my pocket, saved this time from glare-blindness, regained Mr Brown's back, cantered after the others.

But the glory of the morning! It was overcast. Breeze blew. Huge walnut trees waved overhead. Once a boy, herding sheep, stood in simple dignity, leaning on a staff, naked, except for scarf thrown round his throat, dropping behind his shoulders to the ground. Unabashed, pure in thought, he gazed his interest in us. A copper god from Greece.

Grey slabs of mountains were visible behind green leaves. Fragrant hedges were sweet with huge clusters of white dog-roses. A lovely little flowering bush gladdened the whole way; the blossom, a vivid rose. Brave foreground to the mountains, higher as we drew near.

All sorts of little homely flowers bloomed too.

Every kind of dandelion, little bell convolvuli, those pretty daisies, frail and pink, that grow on long stems in Italy, yellow jessamine and, but not till we neared the journey's end, white jessamine, tumbling and spraying just as it does on English cottage porches. Little waterfalls and brooklets dropped and rushed, gurgling, burbling. Sometimes they fell sheer as in Norway, delighting the eye, with long straight lines of silver. It was fertile. Little rounded rice-fields scooped their curves, once like a great amphitheatre.

Bearded wheat, still very green though fully formed, grew in fields behind hedges. Peasants cultivated rich patches of gardens. Constantly we met Thibetans on the road from Ladakh, easily recognized by plain, honest, bearded faces, wearing handsome hats, well-shaped if shabby, turned up with astrachan, long dust-coloured clothes, remarkably well-cut even when ragged, large slip-shod boots of the same colour.

Little Helen taught me to salute them with,—"Joo!"

They briskened and responded to the word.

Two appealed for justice to the Dr Sahib, on foot as always, just then at Droma's side.

A Kashmiri had beaten them and stolen a rupee.

He turned with his stick towards the Kashmiri, who fled, possibly with the rupee!

This was an odd incident. More than one Kashmiri must have been concerned, for they are a feebler race than the sturdy Ladakhis, who, how-

ever simple, would very well know how to strike a blow and defend themselves fearlessly.

We jog-trotted on happily, mostly together, always in sight or only losing each other momentarily, until we gladly descended a long gentle slope to the bridge. Over the far side under trees we were to find Paghspa and the kettle boiling.

Man is raised on false hopes. Woman too. The bridge looked perfect, a short wooden one to a stony island, that split the white walls of the rushing river, a longer one to the farther bank; but inexorable the order stood, printed on a framed board :—

"BRIDGE CLOSED FOR REPAIRS. PATH OPENED ON RIGHT-HAND BANK."

It was our left-hand bank. We were already on it. As a child one learns, among much that proves utterly useless, the valuable fact that one must face the ultimate sea to know right bank from left on a river.

We turned up the pathlet beside us. Under the first willow-tree by a small stream the Mem Sahib decided that baby should have her repast. Leaving her with the cot and trusty Choskyid, on we climbed in quest of Paghspa.

A foretaste of greater perils ahead! The path was a mere track in places, climbing the edge of sharp hillsides, picturesque, wild, delightful. Little Helen minded no more than the ponies, however steeply beneath the wild water ran, nor how narrow and broken the path.

Certain mysterious laws rule this world.

Down on wide road and open plain scarcely a living creature did we meet. Picking our way along a thread of a path, obliquely up and down, among loose boulders, we met pack-ponies innumerable, laden with tents and baggage, and dozens of Thibetans with not only ponies but bullocks and cows laden with family goods and provisions.

One of the parties had to stand and let the other edge by. Once there was nearly a catastrophe.

We thought all of a Thibetan caravan had passed. I turned a rock at the moment a boy had rounded up two laggard hybrids, a cross between yak and bullock. Aware that something odd was afoot, they had scrambled on to the slope, not quite so precipitous above, for the precipice now was beneath us.

Whooping and yelling at them, he properly frightened Mr Brown, who was only half round the rocky corner. He tried to bolt backwards, but there was no place for turning. Rosie Jean Grey's nose was on his rump.

I let out a scream. The syce was not there, he never was, but a ragged Thibetan seized Rosie Jean's bridle and things felt better. Somehow the beasts lurched past us ; they had the safe side under the rock, while Mr Brown balanced—it seemed chiefly on space.

Then we went on—and on—and on.

No Paghspa did we overtake. Unhampered by

an ability to read English, he had crossed the forbidden bridge.

Finally, at a tumbling streamlet, straight from snows not far above our heads, I shouted back to the Dr Sahib, should we wait? And with relief heard that we should.

One little ledge of stone lay in shade. We clambered upon it.

The Mem Sahib found us there and scolded us roundly for not stopping sooner.

No Paghspa! No tea!

But delicious, pure, stinging water served almost as well.

It was not till we passed the second bridge—a mere skeleton structure that should have brought us back to this bank—we found him under a tree with a kettle that must have boiled and over-boiled. Only two miles from Gund; we did not wait.

We had descended to flat ground, woods, rustic scenes and white jessamine. A big lizard basked, with throbbing goitre of a throat, on the rounded stones of a wall.

And the last mile was longest of all on a stubborn little pony, probably ill-fed, who needed the whip all the way.

The Mem Sahib's back distanced farther and farther. It was crooked, twisted to one side with her burden of a tired little girl, who begged to be carried in her mother's arms.

May my eyes never forget green sward, giant

walnut trees, dirty little bungalow and the joy of arrival, dropping off the horse in deep, dark shade, looking away over green grass to roaring, tumbling, hastening river, white, foamy and greenish beneath a noble bank of trees.

A little later three tents stood on a grassy ridge, flaps widely open to a view of tall pine slope over the river, topped with peaks of everlasting snow.

CHAPTER V

From my Note-book.
At the river's edge, Gund.

A HORSE-CHESTNUT in white bloom leans out from trees opposite, over the foaming, raging river.

I never knew any but sea-waves could toss so tall, bulk so large, force a compact of green water so high in air, fling and foam, creamy as the white chestnut flowers against the dark pines. Distant snows, far overhead, renew the white in huge patches, still and silent, as the waves are noisy.

"We will! we will!" They seem to thunder in deep incessant resonance beneath the light tossing song of foam.

So tall are the mountains, their shadows darken all but sunlit crests. Far distant snows gleam in golden light.

Lower down the dark slope a variegated mass of trees intermingle closely. Willows, lime trees, beech, something small like nut trees. All this I guess, but do not know, and they probably are of totally different species.

The Dr Sahib throws a stick far into the torrent. It travels quicker in the water than in the air. It

is snatched down. One swift moment we watch, then it is swallowed in a vast wave.

He comes back to shout above the roar :—

" When you come back the water will be smooth and quite blue—blue as the sky ! "

A little backwash rushes up the green bank like wavelets on the seashore.

. . . . . .

Early to bed.

Lights presently wandered around. One flashed from the wilderness of the opposite slope, intriguing me much.

I slept, and was awakened by moon-rising. Soft light flooded pine slope and distant snows. Gladly one wakens for such sights ! Lacing holes down the flap of my tent made a row of stars joining the Big Bear, throwing up behind the pines.

Slept again and time to wake. Morning sharpness was acute. Good to be cold instead of hot !

We breakfasted on the green lawn under the great trees and got away, Helen and I together.

Gund to Sonamarg. 14½ *miles.*

We passed a camp away to our left, where a young fellow looked glad to see us, waving his cap. Up a slight rise, and had not gone a quarter of a mile when Helen asked :—

" Where are our solar topees ? "

" On the man's arm," I replied promptly, having placed them there myself, but turned right round in my saddle to look. Where, indeed ? He must

have laid them down, when somewhat officiously he helped me to mount.

I drove him back to fetch them.

"Run!" I cried. "Juldee! Juldee!"[1]

He put on a mild jog-trot downhill while still in sight. We did not see him again for hours. Mercifully a Thibetan coolie turned up with the hats before sun was high, and we exchanged our light straws for them.

At the top of the easy rise the valley spread before us. Great green slopes converged downwards to tossing, tumbling water. Snows, here and there, cut slants all the way down in pure white lines through the green. About us were gentle lawns, where we could canter, great trees and many families driving sheep and goats.

The shrub of yesterday cast rosy-pink petals on grey rock and boulder beneath it.

"The fairies have had a wedding! Look at the confetti!"

We rose on a steep rocky path, sheer above the river. Without the syce I sent Helen ahead, at least to see her. She went fearlessly. We fell again to flat earth and rich cultivation. Pretty girls by the wayside glanced up with dusky eyes under jewelled caps.

We passed a man, one of the lazy, giving himself most trouble, heavily bent under two native beds. He could have unstrung them, but preferred to stagger beneath them. At least they gave shade to his back.

[1] Quick.

We dawdled, dawdled, but the syce never came. At last the Mem Sahib arrived and hustled us on. We passed through clusters of brown cottages, dropped down a path between stone walls to the river, crossed a narrow, wooden bridge, cantered on turf on the farther side to gracious lawns, beneath steep slopes, big trees and bushes. A wonderfully sweet scent rose, but I could not find its cause. Under trees by a spring we met a rich travelling family. The father hustled white lambs, black lambs, small boys, lovely goats with silky hair touching the ground, little girls and babies off the path,—animals and family all mixed up together.

A final canter, over another bridge, a hot dull stretch for a mile, then big trees by the waysides, grass, water dropping from snow only just above.

Choskyid and baby's cot were waiting with the tiffin basket.

. . . . . .

But the afternoon baffles all words.

Roses turned pink instead of white. Exquisite sprays flung across distant scenes of snow and pine. We seemed farther and farther from the rabble of the world. Little rice fields were well tended.

It was the day of families. Again and again we met the pretty creatures, Kashmiri women in tight-fitting caps, dangling earrings and chased silver ornaments. Children in long caps, shaped like crusaders' mail. Sometimes the piece dropping to the shoulders, was fastened there to a little three-cornered cape.

I longed for my camera; but they never will be snapped in their careless beauty.

Swiftly we passed down a dropping path under divinely shady trees, steep and rocky. Foliage, ferns, and flowers sweetened the way, boulder-strewn, mottled with shade and sun. We dropped to the very rocky edge of the river, high rock wall to our left. Once I thought I saw asparagus fern overhead. It was something as fine and fluffy. Out again on more open ground, short-cutting a long twist of the river. Climbing among pine trees, the river left behind us, little Helen begged her mother to take her in her arms on Droma as yesterday. But the rough path made it impossible.

We dismounted, sat beneath a grand old pine tree on a fallen log in the shade. The child put her thumb in her baby mouth, fell off to sleep on her mother's lap.

"What is he doing with the horses?" the Mem Sahib asked.

I raced up the path in time to prevent the useful syce leading them on to Sonamarg, and prevailed upon him to hold the ponies in the shade, not the sunny spot he considered desirable.

Woods and narrow valley left behind us, grassy slopes widened gently to snowy heights, here more distant. The river grew quiet. The path led over meadows. An adorable little flower appeared. A tiny cluster of the smallest daisies, white petalled, pink-edged, growing on one stem, flat as a plate. Can it be the first original primula? Undoubtedly,

if not so, we met this soon on a taller cluster, looking something like a cowslip ball, but of purple flowers, growing on a single stem high above flat velvet scalloped leaves. Ever on, and so came to Swiss upland pastures, a village of brown wooden cottages, overhanging roofs and fretwork, at the foot of a short cliff above the river, sprinkled by tall solitary pines.

I took a hurried sketch. A youth, possibly a Hindu student from the plains, picked up my dropped pencil and held Mr Brown. He looked very poor, shirt hanging over trousers, worn straw shoes. I offered him a silver piece. He laughed and declined it.

Then came the wooden bridge, up the short cliff above the village, sharp round a bend, and lo! wide stretches of level green grass.

Mother Nature made a big lap in the hills and pastured her cows peacefully.

A good mile of this open country, great mountains standing afar off, over which Mr Brown consented to canter, and where the Mem Sahib joined me, leaving her recovered daughter on her pony in her father's care, we came to a small, bare post-office and an ugly, squat little bungalow, set in an uninviting yard.

So direct were the sun's rays we were glad to fling ourselves down on chairs in a dirty, squalid room, in a glorious draught between open door and window, made by clean, clear mountain air.

CHAPTER VI

SONAMARG, too, is a summer resort. Tents are pitched. A few years back huts were raised for moderate figures, but prices are rising. Just what the " Sahibs' Camp " looks like, I do not know. It is about a mile off the direct route on another Marg or pasture-land, branching off to the right, as we faced towards Ladakh. We spoke of visiting the Camp in the evening, but did not.

A biggish river closed the valley, coming through a glorious, narrow pass, where snowy peaks caught the last evening glow and made a perfect picture, seen from open doors of the three tents. At moonrise the first tall slope to the left stood black against its silvery light, tenderly flooding distant peaks. Cold it was, deliciously cold in the evening, yet colder in the early morning.

A small grey-roofed village clustered to the left beyond the river, beneath a very grey mountain cliff, rising austerely to great perpendicular height. I ought to have sketched, but was tired after much writing, and grey is most tiresome to mix.

Extra food was got for the ponies, who were to be fed in the Dr Sahib's presence, bought from a man with a noisy voice, who also superintended the selling

of a live fowl. A number of men stood around and grew excited, but not more so than the fowls, who spluttered and squawked and added loud voices of protest.

Sonamarg to Baltal. Only 9 miles!
June 18th. From my Note-book.

Helen and I were off by seven this very blessed morning. She in great spirits. A glad delight was ours. Bed till six o'clock.

Indescribable the happiness of that child as we started off in morning freshness. Standing up on her stirrups, calling to her pony, using the switch it was impossible to deny her, bumping and chuckling with silvery delight as he broke into jog-trot. "Isn't it beautiful, auntie?" she asked, referring not to the mountains, but the bumps.

I scanned the valley for our path, but could not discern it. The village led nowhere. Only a goat could scramble beside the river.

It was quite simple. We crossed the bridge as if to the village, turned off sharply at right angles up a brown hump, meeting our first flock of sheep on the narrow-twisting path, finding lawns on the top for Mr Brown to canter. A tang of cold in the air made the sun welcome when at last it came. It rose before we started, but stayed behind great slopes.

For the first time the scene, though on far larger scale, reminded me of Scotland. It grew more grave. A few rare pines. Mountains folded in

wooded slopes or rose above us in quiet grass and rock. Waterfalls fell sheer. One burst forth about half-way from a summit from a cave, whose roof looked in the distance to be thickly hung with stalactites.

On and on we went. Lazier and lazier was the syce, till I felt like driving two pigs to market, Rosie Jean Grey and him. Mr Brown responded to his fresh feed of oats, and gained ground quite gladly with occasional canters, when I left Rosie Jean Grey with the syce, meaning to wait for them, but always found that indomitable child bumping after me. Mr Brown's crawling walk easily enabled her to overtake him.

Sometimes we got muddled up in the path with the coolies and that ever sweetly sleeping baby. This pleased the syce much, chance for chatter, especially with Choskyid—he looked an amorous Mohammedan—but annoyed me, for I knew we got in the way of the coolies' steady, unbroken tramp, "unhasting, unresting."

This was the day of sheep. All along the narrow path we kept meeting them. Once the bleating cry of many plaintive voices rose to our high rocky path. We looked down on multitudes of backs, black, brown, and yellow, moving on a great shingly flat, far below beside the river. They had passed the night there, and were starting afresh. Shepherds in long, dropping shawls divided them with tall staves. Impossible not to think of Laban sharing out sheep with his son-in-law.

Shepherds need to be men of emergency and courage. Dangerous and dreadful tracks are traversed in search of scanty pastures. Water is often lacking for many a weary mile. They guard their flocks from wild beasts, precipice-falls, and tend them skilfully in fatigue, when footsore, perchance even wounded.

Twice we crossed deep wedges of snow, still unmelted, lying in great lines from summit to river. These can be most dangerous, but each time we found a foot-wide, dirty path, narrow but quite flat, securely and well trodden down, chiefly by little hoofs of driven sheep and goats. The snow looked like granite, so dirty, shiny, hard had the wedges become. And down the far side, on earth but lately released, grew clumps of golden crocus, lifting up joyous little heads as though to say, "Here we are again!"

Sun up, we stripped off woollies, donned solar topees, and crossed the only tiresome piece of the day. Wind failed. The long flat stretch, though green pasture, was treeless and hot.

At the far end under trees we saw blue smoke arise,—a solitary horse stood by the fire. We hoped it was Paghspa's. Approaching, we found the man was back a good way from the path, on a wide stone water-course, traversed by a mere trickle of rushing water.

We picked our way among grey boulders, while the syce stood on the path and whistled to us not to go. He was right. It was not Paghspa, but a

wandering Thibetan. We crossed the brooklet to the shade of a pine tree, dismounted, fetched clean water to drink, and picked our first edelweiss. The Mem Sahib joined us. I sketched while they went on, taking the syce.

Then I had the whole glorious world to myself. Majestically rose peaks at either end of the valley. Wild wallflower grew in the grass, so brilliant a yellow, it gives its name to the Marg.[1] These, too, grew not up the stem, but flat as a plate at the top.

A slight rise, the geography of the land spread plainly. A sharp descent, a slight hill, and then another Marg or pasture-land, flat and green beneath peaks, divinely rising, far above scattered clumps of pine trees.

The white solar topees of the Mem Sahib and little Helen bobbed on the green not far ahead. Stopping to make a rough sketch I hoped to join them later with a good canter.

Green gained, all might have gone well, but that as I urged Mr Brown forward, and it always meant a great exertion, a sharp, unexpected breeze blew the solar topee from my head.

Back I turned.

Mr Brown shied at it on the ground. Relentlessly I put him almost over it, slid off.

Now every horseman will smile.

I left the rein on the pommel, caught it in my hand near the bit, stooped to reach the hat. Fingers an inch off it, wind lifted it away. I tugged Mr

[1] Sonamarg means the Yellow Marg.

Brown. He would not budge. For one instant, (as I thought,) I took my hand off the rein. It was enough! He was off over the Marg.

Did I follow him? Did I chase him? Did I track him stealthily? Did I keep him in the right direction? Though, crab-like, he went over the grass to the distant river. Did I run till all breath was beaten out of me and yet run on? And did he sometimes let me get almost in reach? Once I could have grasped his tail,—but am glad I didn't. And did I, when he was almost down by the distant river, somehow drive him back to the path? Wandering horses joined and left him. If only the reins were loose he might have stumbled and stopped. Certainly he would have eaten grass. He tried, but could not.

Oh! that run! It makes me ache to think of it. Gradually I got him back to the path. Would he go onward to Baltal, or backward to Sonamarg? If backward there was yet hope that the coolies would meet him. But I side-tracked off, headed him and drove him forward, not daring to run near him, for two legs cannot cope with four. And I got him on the path! It left the Marg, turned abruptly downward, a mere cut track upon a steep slope. At the top of the slope the lazy syce suddenly appeared. Why he was there I shall never know, but he was.

"He is caught!" I thought. All the syce had to do was to drop down the slope ahead of him. But did he? No, not he. He let him pass, then

scrambled down the slope and followed him. Mr Brown saw him and fled, clattering.

Not till a Kashmiri coming up the path stopped him, bore the brunt of his wrath, forefeet and heels alternately in air, could I understand why the syce had not stopped him. Then I knew.

Even had he the politeness to wait for me when he took the now mild Mr Brown from the stranger I could have given the Kashmiri the backsheesh he richly deserved; but true to his aggravating ways, that non-co-operative walked Mr Brown onward with my purse in the bag hanging off the pommel. He passed over a wooden bridge before waiting for me, in spite of my shouts and signals.

An English couple breakfasted cosily before a tent on a small point under trees, jutting on to the water. I rode up a short steep zig-zag path under trees and came into the sweet, green shady oasis, which is Baltal.

. . . . . .

Sunday, June 18th. Baltal.
From my Note-book.

But the best of all! Gradually ascending, as we are doing all the time, every stopping-place seems nearer heaven.

I am sitting on a good square wooden armchair, taken from the clean little bungalow, beside the gnarled and twisted trunk of a great tree, species unknown, with oblong leaves growing singly on light twigs, good switches they will make for the ponies.

There are many such trees on this high knoll, wedged in against mountains, two powerful streams hush-rush some hundred feet beneath, making a promontory or peninsular of this sweet patch, where immense trees stand ankle-deep in grass, dock leaves, delphinium (larkspur), not yet in flower. A fragile blossom, too, unknown to me. They are fairy conches. Half-way down the trumpet the flower is tipped on to a tiny stalk. The mouths are widely open and deeply purple, as if shouting praise that our ears are too dense to catch. Great logs lie in this luxurious growth, and fastidious fritillaria [1] point gnome-like heads. Odd brown flowers, freckled with deeper brown and purple, at the top of long stalks and spiky leaves. Creamy spiræa and blue forget-me-not fleck the grass. Rocky slopes, pine-scattered, rise sheer overhead. Droma flicks flies off her round body with a long whisk of grey tail. White butterflies chase each other in twos and threes. And the lazy syce's two ponies try to steal Droma's food, and are chased away by Paghspa.

[1] In England the fritillaria grows only near Oxford. I have gathered it when shooting the rapids with Indians from Cowachan to Duncans in British Columbia.

CHAPTER VII

The Great Day. Over the Zoji Pass.
June 19th. Fifteen miles.

In black darkness came the morning call.

Mysterious, weird, one's name sounded, half whispered with compelling chord at that dread hour.

The Dr Sahib, already in sweater, applied a match to a fire, laid overnight in my big room.

A few minutes later all were there, eating breakfast in the dark, the table lit by a lantern and candlestick. Little Helen had her small chair and table by the blazing logs.

"How tall your shadow is! Look, Daddy, look!"

It loomed up over the white-washed wall, gigantic in the flare.

We were off in that dark, dim morn. Rosie Jean Grey, Mr Brown and the stout syce.

The horses were hard to move, shied, jibbed, stood.

"*Ney udder juldee! Ney!*"[1] Helen screamed when the syce persuaded Rosie Jean Grey to jog.

British soldiers would have expressed pithily our

[1] "Not so quick! Not!"

morning sensations. A maiden aunt is not expected to use such a word; but nevertheless felt the void where the nameless organs generally preside. The syce, who never possessed them, knew no difference, but Helen and I were acutely conscious of a gap. So much are we the creatures of the moment, the children of the hour.

As we breasted the sloping path and stood free of our nestling valley, I looked up at the enormous hills, encircling us as though we were insects at the base of a cup, and wondered once more in all this narrow, vertical world where was the outlet?

Then I saw it.

A path in long zig-zag, just two angles, cut the face of the high green mountain straight before us. All very well there, but when it crept along that rocky edge. . . . Sincerely I hoped the Mem Sahib would reach us before the Precious and I rose to those dizzy heights.

Choskyid trotted ahead cheerily, flicking her whip, in another beautiful garment, a big sleeveless coat, lined with cosy, long-haired sheepskin, just the right smoke-blue to touch to perfection her scarlet hat and saddle-bags.

The big basket cage with that placid, sleeping, blue-eyed baby swung up the slope of the gigantic cliff.

A sort of sob caught my throat. A kind of early morningish feel that had something to do with grim lines, stark overhead, and cosy, white-lined cot. Never was contrast more queer.

We reached the upper path, crawled round a nasty bit I had marked from far below, where it bulged over, a sort of crusty bunion on the mountain-side, got round a corner, and, always mounting, came into a deep, dark rift or angle of the cliff, curving upwards to gigantic wall ahead, absolutely sheer, with a black thread, the path, sloping steeply up its face.

" We'll wait here, darling," I said, " for Mummy."

. . . . . .

Faces stuck against the rock, legs towards space, the ponies stood. I should have preferred their looking at what was behind them ; but that track was no suitable spot to discuss their preconceived notions. I tried to tell stories. Helen palpably thought them puerile ; but to her a khud is safe as a nursery floor, and why not ? Since khuds are her nurseries.

At last she came. Alone, though we had seen the white sweater walk ahead as they crossed the sweet, flat meadow far beneath us.

" He has had to go back," she said. " We have both left our rings."

This is the journey of left-behinds ! But this morning the most serious of all. With no egg-cups in the tiffin-basket, they take the rings from their fingers and balance the egg on its tip on the small circle. Both had been left on the breakfast table. Trashie had cleared in the dark.

"It is his wedding-ring. My engagement ring," she said, mournfully.

Droma led the way. Helen followed her mother. Choskyid and the baby were ahead. We could see the fragile basket-cot, pale yellow against grey-black cliff, slant up the thread-like path. It looked as if blown against a wall. I found it best to study the path at my feet, not to look at the nearing black thread, nor the mountain wall across the narrowing gorge, cut sheer, falling straight as a table-cloth off a table, split with enormous splinters, as though they had been sliced by a mighty giant with one clean blow.

And yet their mystic beauty gripped my heart. Looking back, all my life I shall feel I climbed bastions, walls, pinnacles of the greatest Gothic cathedral in the world.

"Look at the shadow our mountain throws!"

"Bigger than Daddy's this morning."

It covered the entire green valley now far beneath us, crept up and marked afresh with stark pinnacles the mountain slopes beyond.

"Look at the ice-plant!" the Mem Sahib called, trying to pluck it off the wall with her left hand.

Rounding the next outstanding corner recalled the roof of Notre Dame. In blasting the path they had thoughtfully left, just for a few yards, splinters along the outer edge, odd-shaped and weird as the gargoyles on that roof, sheer space behind them as there; but how different the fall! Little Helen and her mother were equally indifferent to the

dizzy height. They called out to each other to look at birds, dropping into the air directly beneath them. They did not seem to mind the sharp wind, blowing gusts of dust off the edge into space. I fought a belief it would as easily blow us off too.

So little did they heed the danger that barely had they passed another dreadful bulge than they stopped; ponies' legs once more directed to space. I had to pull up suddenly with Mr Brown's hind legs just over a couple of thousand odd feet drop.

"Go on!" I screeched like a pea-hen. "Go two yards farther and there'll be something behind me!"

"I can't," the Mem Sahib answered calmly, as though a table-land extended for miles behind the ponies. "I'm tying the child's hat on with this scarf."

But she edged Droma sideways so that Mr Brown too could put his face against the wall.

Afterwards she told me she had completely lost all sense of fear. Oddly enough it left her after typhoid fever. Since that illness she not only feels stronger but has lost the sense of personal peril. Yet earlier, when ill and delirious at Leh with pneumonia, that cliff was her constant nightmare.

"We can never go back to England," she would sob. "I cannot go over that cliff!"

Farther on we turned right round the mountain side. New vistas opened, closed ahead by a saddle-back, scooped between peaks, snow-covered, but mercifully flat.

We dismounted where the path ended, turned

the horses' reins over their heads. I wanted to give the syce my mackintosh, but the Mem Sahib thought Helen's horse was enough for him. Oh! that mackintosh! How I trailed it from arm to arm, for it dropped from pommel, all those fearsome hours. They told me I should need my fur-lined coat. Here and now I humbly render thanks I had not my fur-lined coat. Either I must have abandoned it or been overtaken by night and died in its folds!

Helen took her Mummie's hand and we slid down a small drop on to the snow. I tugged at Mr Brown behind my back, and let him manipulate that drop in his own fashion. I did not turn to see how he did it. What does a fall matter when one falls on the flat? Already I knew not only by his abnormal sluggishness but by other symptoms that he was very far from well.

At first I thought the oats had not been given him; but talking it over since, fear he supplied deficiencies by eating poison grass that grows in the luxuriance at Baltal. Ponies only eat it once. He may not have been that way before. Thibetans call this grass *Mungo*, meaning "sleepy," for it induces a sort of somnolence. Not the best preparation for the Zoji Pass.

However, that bit of the way all went cheerily. The basket with the sleeping babe swung pleasantly. We walked for the pleasure of it. Peaks on either side were so near, a nimble boy could have climbed to one and waved his hat while we pursued our

gentle pace.[1] The Dr Sahib joined us on the snow. He had his ring. They sought the place where the washing-up water had been thrown and found it.

Nothing brought home to me what agony of mind our Mem Sahib went through that day as the fact that she had no room in it to grieve over her cherished ring,—if only her babies were safe.

As all the rest of the day I fell farther and farther behind, most joyously do I recount that I was first over the gentle summit of that snowy pass. The fresh air oddly caught one's breath. Reining-in Mr Brown, who needed small inducement to stop, I shouted back :—

" On the top ! On the top ! "

And felt on the very top of the world, all India sloping at one's back to the sea, fondly believing all was conquered.

The snow slopes grew very long, though still flattish, descending gently. Mr Brown hesitated every third step. If there were a small crevice, split by sun, or a hole where a pony had already thrust his hoof, he became decisive, put his foot into it and stumbled heavily. Pommels kept me on his back. Large crevices, of course, we avoided, sometimes having to make a detour, where the sun had cracked them into miniature chasms. Quite a large stream, almost a river, meandered along, sometimes disappearing under snow-crusts. Black against whiteness it appeared. Its twists, when

[1] He would need to have been nimble indeed ! They were farther off than they looked.

visible, made it hopeless to guess where it went when out of sight; the melting snow-crust above it did not seem a healthy spot for man or beast. Pack-ponies laboured along. A dead horse-skin blown out like a balloon, distorted head turned upwards with an expression of agony, was a dark blot on the snow, while the big basket-cage made a tiny speck on vast whiteness.

She slept, that heavenly babe, all the way, and when, straw curtains rolled up, one peeped within and she awakened, her round blue eyes laughed as she lay among soft pillows. Dimpled fists clenched, she chuckled at the coolies, innocent of all peril.

Ahead lay an opening valley, where green grass lay in patches. I laugh to remember that as we descended I thought it the end of our trouble,—the stone hut upon it our destination. Paghspa joined me on those slopes, urged forward Mr Brown with voice and whip. It was here I first realized that the Thibetan cook with his pig-tail and big spoon thrust through the sash on his long dust-coloured coat was a man of acumen and intellect, to say nothing of heart.

But the Dr Sahib was walking at my side when we saw the others standing.

"Why are they waiting?" he asked impatiently. He knew, (though I did not,) what was ahead.

"There's some one with them! A man," I exclaimed.

It is extraordinarily heartening to meet a fellow-wayfarer in the wilds. All are friends. No one

waits for introduction. All are men of the wild, of rugged, virile tastes, and tenderness to women and little children.

It was Major S. and his sister.

"Good Lord!" he said, when we came into sight. "Who's this? A woman on a side-saddle!"

He had been too badly wounded, permanently injured in the leg, to shoot, but had come with his sister, six weeks since, and visited Leh for the fun and experience of it. She said that when they crossed the Pass, all that time ago when snow was infinitely thicker, it had been the worst day of her life. One of their pack-ponies had slipped off a khud, been lost in the torrent with all their collected treasures.

On we went. Down to the grassy patches, jogging along another valley, at right angles to the saddle-back we had left. Joyously I urged the weary Mr Brown, feeling all was done.

Then we came upon it.

A pathway feebly tracked in snow near the foot of a slope, sharply edged on to a roaring, rushing turbulent torrent of a river. Crust at the edge broke some twenty feet thick and hung like sugar on a cake over the hastening foam.

Some thirty feet from this horrid edge, footmarks darkened a tiny track across a steadily declining slope of snow. The Dr Sahib helped us down the drop that again led on to it, handing me Mr Brown's reins when I reached the (comparative) level.

"Don't let him push you!" he cautioned me, as I took the reins.

YAKS CROSSING THE ZOJI-LA.
(Three weeks later.)

Idle warning!

It was all I could do to find my own foothold, sometimes on mere stones jutting out of the sharp slope. All I knew of Mr Brown's choice of holes, or of crushing in ice by his own weight, was the violent shock of his head on mine as he stumbled.

Blindly one worked along. What sort of peaks stood around I have no more notion than if I had never been there.

And then we came upon our brave Mem Sahib, almost sobbing, calling her husband's name. "Look at baby! A man has slipped!"

That precious cage was swaying, tottering over the precarious foothold, Choskyid knee-deep in snow, ready to fling her faithful body against it, the straw-shoed men labouring along painfully.

"Go to them!" she cried.

It was the only time she gave any sign of all she went through that day. Helen she held by the hand.

He hustled on.

It may have been ten minutes, it may have been two hours later, the luncheon-coolie came to my assistance after Mr Brown had twice with great difficulty regained his feet, (he may have fallen flat oftener, I only looked round when compelled,) and he had pushed me over three times.

Once I slid down the snow slope towards the water. That time my grasp of the reins stopped me. He, luckily, was stuck like a rock, the near leg up to the shoulder in snow. I went off in a

sitting position, but crawled back to him on hands and knees.

The coolie-man ran up with a shawl. I stared at him and denied it, but he insisted, thumping the saddle. The path had broadened. I had just mounted.

I peered down at the saddle. No saddle-cloth was beneath it. Hitherto the syce had provided one, ragged but useful. To-day he had put both cloths on Rosie Jean Grey. He may have thought it was safer for Helen. The shawl was soft white wool, a delectable shawl for an old lady's shoulders. No less than five times that day did it utterly decline to be used as a horse cloth, worked its way out, and fell upon the ground.

The coolie-man took Mr Brown from me. It was bliss to go alone. Eyes were glued to conditions before one. Shouts made us raise our heads.

The little party near the cot were calling. Arms extended, black over snow, they pointed behind us.

We looked.

A pack-pony, helpless between two packs, was rolling down the snow slope about ten feet above the torrent. Never could one forget the horrid sight of his feeble legs fluttering in the air, the lurch with which the heavy packs rolled him over yet farther. Two coolies detached themselves, slid down the bank, held pony and packs where they were by brute force.

Somehow he wriggled his legs beneath the pack, courageously struggled up, swayed, nearly went,

ah! that black turmoil of rushing water, and, selfish thought, was my suit-case on his back?

He was safe.

Dizzy and sick with the sight we plodded on.

"The bad, big, long piece!" Helen called it days later.

Thinking the coolie with me should go to the pony's aid, in the middle of the struggle I insisted on detaching him and taking Mr Brown. It was Choskyid, having given up her place to her master, who rescued me at the next nasty drop. Her company was heartening.

Every here and there boulders and earth were now showing through snow. I was again alone, painfully dragging the lagging Mr Brown among them, when swiftly a Kashmiri woman overtook me. Burden on head, she led a small boy by the hand, passing lightly and gladly as if on a meadow-path, throwing a smile back over her shoulder.

When sudden drops were at their steepest, deep holes most frequent, I had only to say to myself:—

"There are people in London tubes, going up that abominable, giddy, mounting stairway," to feel quite safe and extraordinarily happy, out in the open air with clean, white snow, rushing water and blue sky.

But poor Mr Brown bothered me. He was very far from well. Stubbornly he stood, refusing to climb a huge hump that rose, a miniature mountain, on the stony, snowy path.

In vain I tugged him.

Then valiant Paghspa arrived upon the spot. Pig-tail tucked through black sash he skipped lightly ahead, dragging the reluctant Mr Brown by the full length of his reins.

Realizing the uselessness of further resistance, that pony picked up each foot and put it down as if he were a princess in a false position. Yet further indignity, Paghspa courteously handed me the far end of his long tail, insisting on thus hauling me up behind him.

I clutched at the extreme point, holding back as far as possible, inwardly protesting at the proximity of Mr Brown's heels, using it like a bell-rope in a steeple, pulling only if obliged, lengthening it when I could.

Outlined against the snow we processed in long unbroken line. Paghspa high above, attached by looping reins to the long slope of Mr Brown, whose tail, like a rope, reached to me, far beneath, struggling up in skirted coat, riding breeches, lumber jack boots and floating veil.

Another pack-pony went over. The party in front were too far ahead to see it, and I was glad. It got even nearer the water with one swift, sudden roll. The men had to unfasten the packs. The pony crawled from beneath them just over the edge of the crust,—a mere foal it looked. A graceful little thing, so pale a chestnut it was almost yellow.

And so, slowly but safely, we got over the last bit before Machoi. Good earth of the mounting

path steeply climbing to a stone hut on a solid green mound, that seemed grandly substantial.

Inside the rude shelter I found the Mem Sahib, her own blessed babe at her breast. She looked up from the little one to me, eyes softly diffused with relief and happiness.

"They are both safe!" she whispered. "It will be bad when I miss it, but just now I can't even feel sorry about my ring."

. . . . . .

We had brunch in the little rough hut. I managed to scrawl a sketch of upright green slope and snow above it. True to custom little Helen and I started ahead; but touched by my cry on entering: "I ought to have had a syce if only for the day!" the Mem Sahib detached Paghspa for my special service.

"She has told him to be loving to you," the Dr Sahib said. "So don't blame me if he is."

"I said, 'Show the Miss Sahib kindness,'" she explained. "It is the same word as love in Thibetan."

And the blessed Paghspa showed me kindness.

Friendly paths first led over green shoulders. Among them we met the second wanderer of the day; for this was the day of meetings. A fine-looking fellow, blue-eyed, ruddy bearded.

"But she has been here before!" he exclaimed, as with pride I pointed out my travelling companion. "That's Baby H.; I have seen about her in the books."

"Not Baby H. now," I replied. "You'll meet her cot as you go farther."

He had gone up the Shingo Valley after bear, but failed to meet any.

"However, you'll see some horns," he said. "I've not had a bad time."

Farther down the hill we did indeed meet horns, wrapped in wool, sticking far out over two ponies.

We dropped to a valley, crossed a bridge of planks, holes filled in with big stones, over a torrent. Away sharp to the left we turned, almost facing the way we had come yet slanting enough to carry us eastwards. The others joined us and were soon ahead, taking on Helen.

Here there were only occasional snow patches, long streaks from the mountain top overhead, reaching down to the river. But the track was much closer to the edge, almost over it. Once in a bad place Paghspa would not let me dismount; so I let him halve the reins, taking one in his hand as he cautiously crept ahead, holding the other well up myself.

We were nearly over the snow when he suddenly stopped, said I must get off.

Now the odd thing was that Paghspa and I had not a syllable in common, yet always understood each other. Mr Brown's side, though not very stout, bulged over the snow slant to the river. My two legs swung right over it.

"I can't now," I said in English.

"You must!" he said in Thibetan.

I slid down Mr Brown's left foreleg and landed on his hoof.

Down,—I understood Paghspa's demand. A hole, through which at least two ponies' legs must have penetrated a yard through the snow, was beneath Mr Brown's nose. Any other pony could easily have stepped across it; but to-day it was just the one place on all the vast mountain side where he would insist on putting his hoof.

Suddenly I realized the river was running the other way. All the morning we had been meeting the stream. Now it flowed with us. We had passed the water-shed. Guide-books say there is a division of opinion regarding the exact situation of the water-shed. Of course I meant to decide this point, at least in my own mind, for ever, and lo! here was the water I had blindly followed for a mile or more, gladly speeding away, water-shed dispute left far behind us.

Getting up and down, in and out of saddle, added considerably to the day's work. Heart affected by altitude, all uphill work when possible had to be spared, otherwise it would have been simpler to have stayed upon one's feet, especially with the old lady's white shawl perpetually slipping from beneath it.

The valley widened. Green grass was about us, under the hoofs. Mighty cliffs and peaks reared into everlasting silence above. A tiny whity-green flower, close to the earth, gave forth a ravishing scent.

A cuckoo called, Cuckoo! Cuck-oo! And a lark, bravest of all singing birds, soared high in the blue, rippling over with the gladdest of songs. Water chuckled merrily. The whole earth rejoiced.

Half an hour earlier the Mem Sahib saw the cuckoos, two grey birds. The cock allured and called to his mate, flitting from stone to stone.

She also saw the huge head of a yak, an occasional hump of his body, borne rapidly down the stream. Eyes shut, she thought the creature dead, being washed away. Suddenly his eyes opened. He took a slant across the tossing torrent, landed a long way down on the bank, shook himself and commenced to graze.

We reached another wide, open, flat Marg or pasture-land. Visible at the far end were a collection of small mud houses, happily already reached by the others. Telegraph posts, finishing abruptly at my end, marked the way to Mattayan.

I counted them.

Had Mr Brown been in usual health we would have cantered across that green; as it was, we lumbered painfully over it. I wondered if it would be better to get down and walk. It would have been quicker, but not only were my limbs aching, my heart gave an occasional nasty little hurt; so I clung to Mr Brown and cheered him with kind words. Eighteen poles! Nine poles! At last only three poles! Finally the bridge.

Strips of planks, boulder-strewn to cover big holes, no rails, were flung across rushing water.

I dismounted. Paghspa led Mr Brown. I grasped forward to snatch his tail. Even one hair in my hand would have been enough to restore sense of balance on that horrid little bridge.

This is not a pretty story but a true one. That sly pony guessed what I wanted, opened his back legs, drew his tail right in between them, (the end swished the planks beneath his middle,) and closed them like a door.

For one wild minute I thought of calling Paghspa back. To hold the end of his pigtail would have been unspeakable comfort, . . . but callous with fatigue, I trudged across the planks. A few more stony yards. The lonesome habitation, a shelter in wide, grand spaces reared before me. I joined the cheery little family.

The Zoji had been passed!

CHAPTER VIII

Mattayan.

"THIS is the Dak Bungalow, where they are so . . ." the Mem Sahib began, but stooped to attend to baby on her knee.

"Flea-ey?" I asked, anxiously.

"No, so witty! They get out the visitors' book and write rhymes."

Nothing yet so grand and lonesome as these standing hills. A queer little bit of huddled village stood with straight horizontal lines overlapping each other on a mound beyond the stream, nearly as white with froth as the gigantic cold, silent hills far beyond and above it.

Pack-ponies straggled in by degrees. The Dr Sahib's suit-case had been immersed—the doubtless dramatic history of how and when we did not learn. He laid out ties and collars to dry in the clear air ruefully.

"Starched for the last time!" he said.

Yet another traveller appeared. A bronzed young fellow who had been shooting on the mountain tops off farther valleys. His bag consisted of *burhel* or *napoo*, blue wild mountain sheep, of which they keep the big smooth horns. *Ibex*, with its straight

though twisted horns. *Sharpu*, another wild sheep. *Ovis Amon*, the biggest sheep of all, which he had to fetch right beyond Leh; and *Goa*, the Thibetan gazelle.

With usual hospitality the Mem Sahib insisted on his joining the board, and the Dr Sahib gave him enormous helpings of delicious lamb.

Poor little thing! It stood cosily, led by a string, that little, white, woolly lamb, by the bungalow at Baltal the day we arrived, (only yesterday! was it possible?) and let Helen fondle it.

Half its little corpse was relegated to coolies in reward for bringing baggage, and above all, the precious baby, in safety across the Zoji.

After dinner we got out the visitors' book and studied poetry.

> "We're going to Leh, we're happy to say,
> And a little bit further as well.
> So on our way back, after trying Ladakh,
> We'll compare it to Heaven or H—ll."

Further on we found:

> "*Answer to poet at foot of last page.*"
>
> "There are many who say, 'We have been to Leh,'
> But none to Heaven or Hell.
> So when you come back
> From trying Ladakh,
> Be careful—it's just as well,
> Before giving expression to any impression
> That you've tried both Heaven and H—ll."

"But I was told it was," the sportsman from the

hills exclaimed, "'That you've been to both Heaven and Hell';" which some of us thought even better.

The Mem Sahib on a previous visit tried to keep rhymesters in bounds by the following verse :—

> "There are people who shoot in the dark,
> But in rhyming miss badly the mark,
> When they rhyme it with 'back,'
> They are quite off the track,
> Or with La-di-da *talk* of La *dalk*."

And yet another stands written there :—

> "Who loves the wild, who knows the grand,
> Who seeks the stern, who woos the hard,
> To him alone can such a land
> Speak with the song of harp and bard."

Dear, cramped, dirty little bungalow! How beautifully you stand in the vast quiet valley, safeguarded by white sentinels. Song of lark, rush of water, little flowers, sheltered on the great Mother-breast!

. . . . . .

June 20th, Mattayan to Dras.
12 *miles.*

Up again next morning at grey dawn; but we breakfasted in daylight, again by a crackling fire.

It is such fun not knowing the direction one is going into all these vast mountains, until the path is beneath the ponies' hoofs and the trail ahead.

Little Helen in great spirits, rising in stirrups, slapping Rosie Jean Grey with outspread baby hand, was singing little songs.

"*There is a green hill far away,*" was the tune of the morning; but I am not sure that, like the soldiers, she was not putting her own words.

Up over some quiet little bumps on the ground, (just bumps here, whatever they might be called in England,) went Choskyid and the baby, little Helen and I. At the top of the second bump, before descending to the river, they advised me to dismount. Helen should stay on her pony. This did not please her. She hates to do anything different to others.

"Get off and help auntie down the hill," I suggested. "If you hold her hand tight, perhaps she will not slip!"

And when the little feet slid away in light boots, we clutched, and she knew she had saved me.

Another light bridge, uphill and away left-handedly above the rushing stream. Nothing alarming about these paths five feet wide, even if they do rise abruptly above the water; but we soon gained flatter ground among grass, flowers and boulders. Mr Brown recovered the others by short canters over smooth lawns.

Once the valley widened to the glorious green of young barley. Quaint, flat mud-houses rose with weird gnome-like eye-holes of crooked windows, looking queerly at one. A huddled pile of them perched on a crag above the meadow.

I thrilled at the longed-for sight of a Thibetan village.

"Look at the funny houses!" the Mem Sahib said to little Helen.

"Are they to play fairies with?" the child asked.

A fluffy, green plant accompanied us all the way. At first sight I thought the young leaves might be carrot. We had seen our first rhubarb, brought into the bungalow the previous evening, dear little leaves with short red stalks, still very small, about three inches long. Choskyid said this plant was not edible, but showed us a coarse, green leaf, pointing into fingers, and said they ate its flowers. Later the fluffy leaves expanded into something utterly unlike carrot, and bore a coarse, flat, yellow flower. A relation of wild parsley. It stayed with us for miles and miles.

On one of the banks I glimpsed what I suspected might be daffodil leaves, but soon saw green clustered buds like a long stamen protruding far above them, shaped like a spear-head.[1]

Lords and ladies too were there, and presently a glorious blue added its own wild charm. Blue as borage, though, if it were, a different variety to the blue borage God put with corn-flowers beside white daisies and wild parsley with scarlet poppies, true flag of the country, on the torn and desolated fields of France.

A small St John's Wort had not yet burst into

[1] *Eremurus Himulæcus*. Others spoke of its beautiful blossom. Only dead spikes hung limply on my return.

flower. Dandelions grew close to the earth; but what delighted me most of all was the soft, sweet turf, rich as on the South Downs.

Our valley narrowed to a gorge. A tall wall of sterile hill hid ranges on our left, while on the right mountains did not, as heretofore, raise solitary peaks on summits, but grew peaks all along their ridges, overlapping, blending, crossing, forests of peaks, as in Kashmir we had forests of pine. But pines were left behind, barren soil and rock took their place.

Colours were indescribably soft, lucent, evanescent; and a crispness, a purity, intoxicated the air, rendering all joyous.

Choskyid waited with cot in full blaze of sun on grassy knoll. The Mem Sahib declined to stop till we reached the shade of a certain rock. We went on. When I saw the mountain wall move a little inward and throw deep shade from steep cliff, I thought that was the chosen spot; but no, suddenly the Mem Sahib's leg went over her saddle. A big rock threw a couple of yards' shade. A waterfall gushed high up on the cliff above; but a sheer bouquet of foam.

We mounted again and went away, Droma leading. Helen would not allow me for a single instant between herself and her mother.

"Mummie," she wailed. "*Mummie!*" And correct procession had to form. The Dr Sahib brought up the rear. One single blow of his correcting stick lifted twenty-three years off

Mr Brown's life, nor did he ever forget what was behind him. He even consented to amble.

The valley narrowed. The river seethed, boiled, bubbled, nothing but a hustling mass of whitest, tossing foam, deep down a narrow rocky bed.

Once more an opening, and each time it happened on far higher level, to wide, green Marg. This time the mountains, higher, grander, more sublime, were crowned by one far dominating peak, whence all other mountain lines seemed to run. The river passed more quietly, deep within great carved-out banks; and there rose an elf-like ruin in the middle of the green, made of mud, castle walls with long droll slits—surely not windows?—each crowned with a single black dot.

But do these words express the gnome-like charm of those uneven, broken walls? A background for a pantomime, the foreground should be full of mushrooms, tall hats and weird puck-like fantastic imps. Past this great castle on the plain were fields. A Scottish stretch of grass and strewn boulders rose to a little grey house.

"The grandest thing in all the wide world," I exclaimed, "is the two-storied Dak Bungalow at Dras!"

"They aren't windows up there," they disillusioned me; "they are ventilators."

From my Note-book.

Within, white-washed, splashed walls reach up to rafters stretching far upwards. There are those

DRAS AND THE GOBLIN FORT

who say it is dirty and dreary. Doors and windows open to green grass and burbling stream; two streams, for it divides just above and makes a green island. Delicious winds blow in air, the purest I ever breathed!

A long, quiet night, the best since starting.

A heavenly morning, writing up this diary in the shade of the house, a dip in the ice-cold stream, a good mid-day dinner, make me think Dras the dearest, prettiest little bungalow in the world.

And oh! how the mountains rise and rear and soar above, so near, and yet all so far away.

CHAPTER IX

Dras. June 21st.
From my Note-book.

THAT baby stream is burbling. I am sitting on a boulder. A big magpie walks a few yards away. He lifts his wings, opens a long tail and spreads a black fan. Hobbled ponies browse on the slope that throws delicious shade. Far enough off to be not the least oppressive, wild high crests throw jagged rocks against blue sky.

If I move from the water's friendly murmur, a silence, so profound that it strikes upon the ears, makes itself not only heard but felt. A Thibetan in dust-coloured coat, stylish though ragged, is waving his arms to the ponies. Black sash and black cap finish his costume correctly. A woman, darkly clad, comes lightly down a steep rough path, balancing a basket on her back.

These people are Dards. The chief clans now live in the villages Hanu and Da. Some of them are Mohammedans, one generation, the next Buddhists, then Mohammedans again, so that father and son are never of the same religion. Here they are all Mohammedans. They greet by twirling their hats round and round in front of them as fast as they

can. Women wear rows of sewing-needles in their hats. Each needle represents a friend.

. . . . . .

There I rose, went into the little grey house to see if I could learn more of their customs. Paghspa was taking directions from the Mem Sahib.

He immediately became communicative.

I saw him sit on the ground and hold his hands above his head, and learnt from her he was imitating a bridegroom, who sits on a carpet while they make butter into oil and pour it on his head. The more stained the carpet the richer the marriage. No wonder Paghspa opened his fingers largely above his pig-tail and sleeked it down. He figured himself a very rich and blessed bridegroom, the oil pouring off him in this land of Baltistan.

. . . . . .

From my Note-book.

A new excitement is ours to-day. We change ponies. Kashmiris have left us. Mr Brown and Rosie Jean Grey are stottering homewards across the Zoji, untroubled by their late riders.

. . . . . .

June 21st. Dras to Dundaltang, 7 miles.

At tea we heard loud sobbing.

Little Helen ran out to see what was the matter and came back with the report :—" One poor man " had his ears badly boxed by another and was expressing his grief.

Trashie, laconically, as he lifted things from the table, explained that the syce, engaged for me, did not want to come and was being forcibly persuaded.

Directly I saw my new pony I christened him "Brownie," but Helen, coming down the steps, announced that he was Francis. Her own she called Audrey, high names now being the order of the day, but him I shall always think of as Goblin.

Straps of my saddle were all wrong and far too loose.

Brownie, small, defiant, tossed a mass of thick, cropped mane, flung up head and heels, showed large whites of blue-brown eyes.

Three men held him down like a recalcitrant kitten.

Once on his back he showed nothing but sluggishness. Up the first slope of a pleasantly rounded knoll three smart strokes persuaded him, like his master, that life was real, life was earnest. Both syce and pony set to work, and I speedily found him a far better traveller than Mr Brown, ambling along gaily, very sure on his feet.

As for Helen's, never was there such a hobgoblin of a pony, though he was good as gold. A rough, reddish, Lollo colour, his neck was nothing. A mere thin little slit held it a few inches from his short shoulders. He barely stood nine hands high; while on this oddity her little legs straddled wider than ever across a wooden, native saddle, beautifully covered with highly coloured embroidery.

Peals of laughter rang from the glad little girl as

she breasted the hill, standing high in stirrups, every little finger outspread, giving the pony a slap that might have troubled a fly.

Looking back, rain veiled in silver mist mountains we had passed among yesterday. Pleased with her new pony, Helen consented to stay with her daddy, while I rode along with the Mem Sahib. She told me the new pony-boy was calling Helen, "No-mo," "Little sister." The baby was "Little, little sister." She herself called Paghspa "Uncle," when she went into the kitchen. They all called her "Mother."

In this country of polyandry, where brothers share one wife and no one knows which is the father, the eldest of the brothers alone has that name from all the children, while the other brothers are called "Uncle"; but a different word is used for maternal uncle, which is what she calls Paghspa.

We met droves of sheep, goats, zos, (hybrid between yak and bullock,) bulls, cows, muddled in with many children, one big family. Hair of sheep and goats hung long, fine, silky to the ground. Straight, though twisted horns, (something like ibex,) adorned their heads. Silken beards almost touched the ground. Gentle creatures, all accustomed to human intercourse.

Sun at our back, a good moment for photography, with the little syce to carry the camera and hold the pony. He seemed an earnest little gnome, with a perfect genius for twisting Brownie suddenly, putting his ears between me and the picture at the snap.

Talking of snap, that is what we call to Helen every time we see a waterfall. Who calls first scores a point. Six were visible, falling sheer off the steep slopes at the same moment. If we counted places where they were doubled by intervening rocks or humps, there were nine. Waterfalls such as one might travel miles to see.

"I shan't count any more!" she shouted over Goblin's head. "I can't keep snapping all the time."

But were there ever so many flowers? Stellaria now starred the grass, quivering in light wind. A delicious aromatic herb was always with us. Why do I not know it? Surely it grows in cottage gardens. Flat, prickly-leaved thistles, and still that wonderful blue, as of borage, blending now with wild white parsley.

Round a great shoulder we came into a new valley, into a new world. Close, mighty, dread, enormous cliffs gathered tightly about us. No trees, though still friendly grass and flowers carpeted the earth beneath us, but did not climb the upright slopes. Sparrows chittered, the first I had noticed.

I paused for a sketch of queer, flat houses, perched on high bank before the narrowing gorge. Serrated edges to ranges needled the tops.

The river turned too, ran yet more swiftly, crashing along a rock-bound bed.

Huge mountains narrowed to one small pass or gateway. Far overhead, closing us in, giant walls

towered, red-brown and yellow, grand with unearthly grandeur. It was as though, like Dante, we had struck the confines of another world and must wander into the weird unknown.

And while we hushed our voices, rode with awe, meadows still lay, ever smaller, about our immediate feet, meadows, glad and sweet as those that had never known the shadows of those majestic cliffs. Never have I seen wild parsley and long grass wave together so sweetly as in that grim gorge. A lady's lace handkerchief would agree as well on a smoking cannon.

Down we dipped through grass to the water's edge, and here, shut in as an earwig might be by Wall Street, willow-trees nestled beside the tempestuous torrent. Some tents were up already. We had arrived for the night.

. . . . . .

Dundaltang.

Little Helen conducted me round a short field, where barley was pricking, beneath trees to the river. The water was black as if it had come through a coal country. Dark silth or slack alternated with rocks of burnt sienna, touched with yellow, hence black, discoloured water. Disappointing, when longing for a drink.

Nothing more picturesque than our camp that night! Tents were on the edge of the wood, boughs overhung them.

Paghspa's quaint figure, coral and turquoise

earrings dangling, stooped to blow the fire in the middle of the copse. A white-spread table was under the trees. We glanced up over our shoulders at sheer height above us.

As gloaming deepened, the fire waxed rosy. Right over our heads snow-tops grew whiter and whiter, until at last they turned luminous, still shone to our vision when all else was lost in black darkness.

June 22nd. Dundaltang to Tashgam, 7 miles. Then on to Shimsha Karbu, 8 miles.

Dawn. Pale grey trunks stood up dimly—tall, slim, silent. A stir. A limping figure in the twilight resolved itself into the Dr Sahib, busy as usual, hands full of things.

"Have you hurt yourself?" I cried.

"It's my knee. The cartilage is out. It happens sometimes. It has gone and happened to-day!"

We were ready before the ponies were gathered from neighbouring slopes and sat about on packing cases. At last they came in twos and threes. The Dr Sahib borrowed Goblin, while little Helen sat up before her mother on Droma; but he was too small for him. He had to exchange him with Choskyid's pony. She, brave soul, offered to walk the whole way the moment she knew of the misfortune.

An odd sensation to find oneself suddenly surrounded by Snow-white's gnomes, for we really had arrived among them. None more so than my little syce. A round cap tightly fitted his skull

above a mass of anxious wrinkles. He hung his head, looked sideways and was idiotically silly with all the straps of the saddle, doubtless never having seen such things. Other gnomes rushed around, would not allow me to buckle myself nor to lead Brownie to a kind of leather-box called a yak-dan, from which I purposed to mount.

The little syce and the crowd triumphantly brought Brownie about five feet away, stopped him and proceeded to push him sideways to me, standing on the box. This was too much for any Brownie. He raised his front feet to fight and bit them all round.

Away into the morning freshness, 6.15 a.m. I had multitudes of flowers and tall mountains to myself. The path was good, generally on flat earth, but rising soon after our start to the place where the Major's pony fell off into the river. It did not seem a very bad corner, though the river certainly could be counted on to sweep anything away in a moment. Choskyid had the story. His Kashmiri coolies stopped at the waterfall below for a drink. The ponies, left to themselves, pushed each other on the khud, quarrelled, possibly the meekest of them got knocked over.

At one place the path among boulders and flowers by the waters was washed right away. Happily the valley was flat, if narrow; we were able to scramble on foot among boulders and join it again. Almost at once on the cliff to the left was a floweret, richly coloured as cyclamen, vividly cerise. It lay

close to the bare, naked earth. Choskyid, coming up with baby, clutched some blossoms. It had a lip something like a pea-blossom, straggled flat on the yellow earth among grey velvet leaves, beautifully backed with purple-grey, deepening at the spine to the same tone of cerise. Five tiny regular leaves followed each other down two sides, culminating with the sixth at the point of one full leaf.

Rock-gardeners would have gone crazy with delight. So many odd, dear little plants put up tiny faces from grim rock and slipping shale. Then a beautiful blue crane's bill, I think, anyhow of the geranium family. And again little yellow fingers that clustered together, pointing off the dusty earth. Wild roses appeared once more with the very thorniest of branches. Mallow threw up handsome yellow heads. Yellow belladonna mingled with the bright, blue borage flower. And then the tenderest, most fragile blue-bell, fifty times more blue than in Scotland. Did we see columbine? the Mem Sahib and I discussed it at brunch. It looked like the leaf, but we waited to see the flower.

And next we came upon a bewilderingly lovely plant, high as a shrub, waving great fronds of feathery white, touched with pink.

"Can it be spiræa?" she asked.

"I hesitate to say, but it looks to me like tamarisk."

"It is tamarisk!" she called. "We have it at Leh."

The hard, sinewy, sap-filled stick seemed to declare it. But what a tamarisk! With a beautiful leaf as well as tossing plumes of blossom.

We passed through fields bordered by stone walls, topped for protection with silver-grey tangle of dead rose-bushes, thick and thorny. On them along the way I left many a little tuft of veil.

A small boy ran up a field path with a thing on his shoulder that squeaked like a mouse. He turned to us and exposed the tiniest, little, brown buttock, rounded over his head.

"It is a baby!" the Mem Sahib cried. "Look how small! It can't be a week old."

A few paces farther stood an exquisite bell, big as a Canterbury bell, single and pale grey-blue. My little syce picked it. It was purple within, deeper down bright orange, brown and white at the base to attract the bee past the pollen in the stamen. He handed me three wild roses, this flower and a dandelion in a tight little bunch, and doubtless thought the last as precious as any. But the approach to the little walled wood, where we brunched!

Over stony ground, slipping from the mountain, flower-sprinkled, gushed and rushed the whitest of foam-driven streams, bringing cool draughts of mountain-top air. About it stood a grove of tamarisks, nodding huge creamy plumes, beyond them grew the little wood, green against the bleak hillside, walled and guarded against timber and faggot thieves, for wood is growing rare.

We rode round the wall over a path that was a stream, found the entrance and were on short turf in shade.

. . . . . .

"Do you see anything different?" the Dr Sahib asked.

I turned round sharply, after mounting, to look.

He was walking upright!

The knee had gone into place.

Lingering with that Mary Baby dimpling on her knee, the Mem Sahib realized the great Force making tree and flower and rushing brook. She closed her eyes and prayed that the Heavenly Will might pass through that disabled joint.

And as she prayed it happened.

Luckily for me, she was with me when we passed a small stone habitation under a big rock and told me that it was the mail-runner's shelter, where he sleeps and lives and has his being when not running. They run a *drak*, something between four and five miles, where the next man waits at the shelter, takes over the bag and runs on. There are 240 miles from Srinagar to Leh; so there are about fifty mail-runners on each route, one up, one down, the two routes together making some hundred mail-runners. We met them occasionally, knowing them less by their speed than by the big brass buckle at their belts.

Early in the second march a man overtook us with an extra pony. Droma had just stumbled badly, and would have dislodged little Helen but

for her mother's clutch, so the transference was the more easily made. The saddle had no stirrups, and galling in the extreme—no bridle! She had perforce to be led, but our wee lady was so tired she submitted quietly to the indignity.

Two old men, one nearly bald, his grizzled hair shining on his dark head, were followed by two tiny bleating brown goatlets. How they did wail and bleat when Brownie got between them and their "fathers"! With friendly smiles the old men turned on them and me.

Down below was a double bridge, spanning first to island and then to far side. Comfortably railed, good and solid, I decided to stay on Brownie's back. But not so Brownie. He jibbed when he saw that bridge, declining absolutely to go on. Ignominiously I dismounted and led him across.

The far side terminated in a kind of stone platform projecting over the bubbling froth. Pleased with the capricious little pony, I turned to caress his nose. A thing to which he was not accustomed. Violently he retreated, tossing his head in terror, till about a foot and a bit off the sudden drop. Frightened, I tried to drag him on. This made him retreat another foot. Only two inches were left. I dropped the rein and went away. Even if he returned he would meet the others, and better run away for good than lose his life by toppling backwards into the mad water behind him.

I stood in delicious shade under the high cliff.

My small syce arrived, picked up the rein unconcernedly. They came on together.

On the far side of the bridge the family party were stopped and forced to dismount by zos on the mountain above dislodging stones and boulders, which came hurtling down among them.

I had hoped to change for the better on this side of the water; but the gorge swerved, the deep shade only lasted a few minutes, sun was hot, and the khud now fell sheer beneath my feet, protruding from the side-saddle.

Nerves are queer things. With feet dangling over the inward path, I grow quite callous, thinking:—"If the pony slips I'll catch the ledge as he goes off and stay up here!" But when they hang off space, and I catch sight of tossing water between my boots, far, far below . . .

A sharp struggle of will ensued. Paths along khuds (precipices) have two marked lines. One at the very edge where ponies go, the other under the wall where coolies trot.

Ponies keep to the edge, for packs can be obstructed by knobs or obstacles from the wall. They are totally callous. A stone sticking over the edge is quite good enough for them to tread upon, and where the path juts sharply in and out again, they will short-cut the last little inner piece, save two paces, make themselves a bridge and step across, regardless of a few hundred feet of space sheer beneath them.

That is why I insisted on reversing the order of

progression, made the syce take the outer and the pony the inner path. There is comfortable room for both if only they will do it ; but syce and pony never ceased trying to change places. It may sound an easy enough problem, I can only repeat it was a conflict of wills on an uncomfortable spot for discussions.

The river had sunk to so deep a bed, or we had climbed so high, the noise was not so violent. It sounded like in-coming low tide on a sandy bay after rough weather, continuous yet not noisy. Little wavelets lapped the sides. Islets were submerged. Willows battled bravely, where white waters surged into walls about them.

Finally we crossed to the farther side again, where the world was flatter. Came through the very centre of a village that would have been unlike any village seen before had it not been for the trenches. They were like them. Deep narrow trenches, with low holes in the tunnel leading down densely dark stairways. All were cut out of earth, roofed with earth and stone, wooden door supports perfectly flat on the level of the ground.

These mud-houses, cut down into the earth, are characteristic of the country and give an inkling as to winter conditions of snow, ice, biting winds. At one of our camps I sat before a low stone wall, banked into a short hump of earth. Hearing a noise behind my chair I turned round to find that a small straw hurdle, laid against it, was moving.

Taking my chair hastily away, a man's face first peered from a low dark hole behind it. He next crawled out of an aperture. Stooping and looking into it I saw a dark, little home like a cave. A couple of boys were seated at the embers of a central fire. Chimneys are considered superfluous. It is odd to see women crawl out of such holes like rabbits.

Next we passed mud-houses amid small fields where families live to cultivate in spring and summer, wintering in towns or villages.

We were all together at the last stream. There were no rails to the frail bridge of tilting planks. I tried to lead Brownie across. He would not come, then suddenly pushed rudely past and hustled over by himself.

Startled by his push, not even a hair of him to hold, I looked at the nasty slant of the little bridge, the inviting bungalow under green trees, the others nearly there, and made no fuss about it, went down on my knees and crawled across.

CHAPTER X

Shimsha Karbu.

THE river roared so loudly as we dined on the verandah, if I spoke to the Mem Sahib the doctor could not hear. They meant to sleep outside. The noise drove her within.

Opposite stood the kitchen and servants' quarters, a low dust-covered shed with rounded roof, and the most picksie, gnomelike, square chimneys with wicked eyelet holes, under little gnome hats, tilted mischievously, pointed exactly like the caps, closely fitting the heads of the two gnomelike syces, chatting below them on the ground.

"Mine is a sad, anxious gnome," I remark. "Helen's has a merry gleam. He is all alive."

The Mem Sahib told me how Choskyid had spoken earnestly to mine of his responsibilities.

"Go quietly by her side at the falling-places!" she told him.

Poor little syce! He might well weep at having to come. But he beamed till not one wrinkle was left when, on parting next day, I added eightpence to his wage.

Gloaming deepened. A lurid flare was thrown almost vindictively from the glassless kitchen

window. Failing light shone palely through the slits of chimney windows, giving dreadful meaning to the pupils of their furtive eyes. Blue smoke suddenly poured out of the nearer one, curling upwards ferociously, like whiskers in the wrong place. Squinting, like too many of the other gnomes, the eyes seemed to follow the upward curves.

"That farther one is winking at me!" the Mem Sahib complained.

A weird pi-dog, like a wizard, prowled round the darkening shed in the shadows.

"He has the rickets, poor beast. And look at the gnome-like bone he is gnawing!"

A red glow poured from the open kitchen door. We could see it fall on poles, serving as pillars round the corner, flickering unevenly; and still blue smoke gushed upwards from the chimney, and the eyes, through which it poured, stared at it unswervingly.

"They will all be dancing in a minute. The corner of the shed is off already! It really is hardly decent. They might wait for us to go to bed."

Off we went, leaving them to their antics. I shut my side door. At the foot of the ricketty stairs lay the ricketty dog, high haunches oddly outlined in yellow against jet-black hair. He was devouring the last of the knobbly, gaunt bone.

Elfin lights darted about the walls. Gnomes were out with lanterns.

Shimsha Karbu to Kargil.
The day of Roses. June 23rd.

An arduous march. Up and down incessant khud and my feet over the edge side. But the little syce boy was good and bravely took the "falling off places." The way grew more and more rocky, more desolate, more bare, flowers and grass were equally scarce, yet everywhere, except on the ladder-like khuds, wild roses burst from stony ground and beautifully bloomed.

Such roses! Larger than ours, far deeper in colour, though the colour varied. Some bushes were almost crimson, others nearly white. Newly opened flowers were generally deeper in tone than older ones. Entire bushes were covered, so they seemed to grow not green, but pink. Never were words more literal. The desert blossomed indeed as a rose.

Khud-sense comes and goes.

"Happily little Helen has none," her mother remarked. "She is as fearless as the ponies."

Flat earth does seem good with no further to fall than upon it!

Once more, after nine long miles, we "brunched" in a sweet green wood; so much like the last there is little to say, except it and the village near were called after their product, "*Dried Apricot,*" of course in queer, goblin tongue. And on leaving the wood for a few paces we passed into Paradise. Fields, green growing things, where glorious masses

of wild roses tumbled, sprayed over long grass, and our blue flower made a haze against snow-white columbines, holding out fairy petticoats, dancing in the breeze.

On and on, senseless toil, rising up horrid ladders, simply to drop to water's edge again, where sometimes we were driven off, forced to dismount by paths being broken away. Stones and boulders strewed the inner edge of paths, making it will-power indeed to keep the pony among them.

A cry, however, will soon go up through the land :—

"Prepare ye the way of the Commissioner!" He is coming to Leh next month.

They told me in the little wood we should have green fields with us all the rest of the way. So we did,—but on the far side of the river.

At long last we came upon a mighty meeting of many waters.

Just before this we passed, but did not cross, a handsome bridge of some ninety yards that went from high, architectural towers to the far side, leading to most desolate and lonely mountains, a poor little bungalow offering rest. Six or seven wild and barren stages across this bridge lead on to Skardu, a centre in the wilds visited by sportsmen. A far, fertile valley, where apricots, grapes and melons grow on the banks of the Indus.

A little farther the Suru River poured into the widening bed of our own river, both tributaries of the Indus. Both together took abrupt turn in the

direction of Skardu, while we too turned, but in opposite direction, sharp to the right, up an abominable little ladder on the hill, round a horrid corner, following, or rather meeting, the course of the new river Suru.

Here they pointed out the spot where Dr Ernest Neve had a bad fall, his pony shying, as he turned the bend, at the shadow of his parasol.

Daisies, big as dog-daisies, tufted out of the rock, but from a different leaf, low and fluffy. Little white pinks too, somewhat like Cheddar pinks, peered from crannies. Now and then a wild currant bush clung to a rock.

Our faces were turned towards green fields. Tall poplars nestled down by the on-coming river amid stony hills. Brownie's bridle, tied on by a bit of woolly string, fell off from time to time. A new experience to find one's bridle suddenly round the horse's neck.

At last we reached the green oasis. A little piece was somewhat like Italy. A sweet roll of turf edged a swift-running, silver ditch under poplar trees among stone walls, crowned by silver-grey rose thorns. Gone were the seven feet by four stray patches of barley. Field stretched upon field, one blue with flax.

"Another shoulder!" the Mem Sahib called. A horrid hill, baked in sunshine, reared before us. I felt ready to give up the ghost. But the path turned pleasantly under poplars by the water's rippling edge.

Once more the bridle fell off. I waited for a fresh piece of hairy string, tucked away in the small syce's sash. He had fallen far behind.

The Dr Sahib and little Helen passed, he walking at Goblin's side, the pony no larger than a dog beside him.

Alone I mounted the quaint street of Kargil, where mud-houses overhead almost touched. Women and children peeped down from roof tops. Solemn men sat cross-legged on shop platforms, silently smoking hookahs, receiving my salutation of " Joo ! " about as enthusiastically as men would in High Holborn.

Up a steep alley, poplar-bordered. Once more into a new world, totally unlike anything we had left.

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From my Note-book.
Kargil, June 24th.

A green oasis is dropped in a fold of yellow-brown rocky hills that climb to far blue points, dusted with snow. Tall poplar trees mark the clean descending path, bearded wheat grows in a pocket-handkerchief of a field on one side. Little flat mud-roofed houses edge it on the other. A window, like a dark eye, peers over a wall from a white house behind it. The pillar of a verandah to a house on the hill far above cuts clean against dark blue distant peaks. Between us and them pleasant uplands stretch like lawns. We are to

HELEN ON HOBGOBLIN, KARGIL.

cross them to-day after tea with the Tesildar. He came yesterday afternoon to call with the Hindu Munshi of the Wazir. Himself, man of importance, headman of the village, able to say to many ponies, "Come here," and they come. "Go there," and we hope they will go with us this afternoon.

Yet greater is the Wazir. The British Government send a Commissioner throughout the country to Leh. The Maharajah of Kashmir lets himself be represented by the Wazir.

They both spoke English fluently. Pleasant men, who drew little Helen on their knees and knew how to talk to children.

Later came a curious scene, when the Dr Sahib once more paid off pony-men and coolies. They squatted in semicircle round him, anxiously watching. All seemed pleased, except one old sinner, who amongst other delinquencies had pestered, whenever the khud was worst, that my small syce should share his already light burden. Backsheesh at first denied, he grovelled to the ground, hand to brow, then brow to earth, tried to kiss the hastily withdrawn boots of the doctor.

In turbans and with hookahs, small caps and long beards, men sit in circles round the servants' shed, which has a yet more goblin-like, wicked, tipping cap, topping the leering chimney.

CHAPTER XI

June 24th. Tea at the Tesildar's.

We rode through the village, crossed the river by a suspension bridge, quite the grandest thing we have yet traversed; but my new pony-man stood sternly, only allowed my pony to put foot on it when the Mem Sahib was safely across. Up a steep stony slope, where the Wazir and the Tesildar came down to meet us, accompanied by their two boys, each extraodinarily like his father, fine little gentlemen in long, tight-fitting coats, yellow and brown turbans.

They conducted us first to the "Lady-house," leaving us at a gate in a wall, leading to a small garden.

A bevy of women, gay as living flowers, in *sari* and wide trousers, fluttered off the verandah, surrounded by little barking dogs, children and babies. Much noise, commotion and laughter.

Soon we were seated on a sofa. They stood round or squatted on the carpet, trying to make much of Helen, but our little lady had her own sorrows and did not largely respond.

She had been aroused from afternoon sleep, put on a strange pony, and led—humiliating fact—by

a man with a long rope. This removed at her reiterated request, her father smote the pony with his stick. It broke into unexpected canter. She lifted up her voice and wept. The short ride was unbearably hot. And here were a crowd of unknown people who called her Helen and wanted to caress her!

Our hostess in shot blue and yellow silk trousers, gauze *sari*, looked serene, motherly, and above all, a lady. Choskyid and Baby were the best help to conversation, which threatened to languish. Both nobly bore their part. Baby crowing and smiling as though she knew what was expected.

Never have I seen that serene little creature other than perfect little woman. Big, round, blue-eyed, she is well-named. Already she shows blossoming signs of the sweet dignity, the quiet charm of a Mary-mother. I managed to say "Beautiful," of the little girl's dangling earrings, but we got hopelessly mixed when I said the two boys, who had followed us in, were like their fathers. I rather fear they thought I was asking if they were each other's father.

A plate of sweets, good though simple, white sugar and aniseed, were handed round.

We passed through the house to go to the men, and went up the hillside to a sumptuous tent.

An enormous gramophone stood before it. A round table was laid with an excellent tea, soon poured from blue enamel kettle into handsome inlaid metal tea-cups, guiltless of handles. The

Tesildar lent me a silk handkerchief to hold mine, very hot with the tea.

Helen, who had been off her food, ate meat-patties, cake and several biscuits. We finished with raisins and pistachio nuts. The gramophone provided native wailing, strange to our ears, though probably pleasing to theirs.

Up came a British officer, already met at the bungalow, to ask if he could have ponies for Skardu, and joined us at tea in the tent. The Wazir and his family were all off too on ponies that day with packs to follow; but the Tesildar seemed able to provide any amount.

The Wazir's family came out from the "Lady-house" below. Babies were packed into dandies. His wife mounted astride a widespread native saddle. We could see it happening down the hill, though they did not come near us, and neither of the men stirred. The little girl of the earrings straddled her steed. Her smaller brothers sat one behind the other on a pony.

They were hardly away before we followed.

A stony, upland path wound among boulders till we reached a beautiful, flat tableland sparsely covered with thin grass. A former Wazir had tried to irrigate it, but failed. With rivers roaring beneath, a competent pump system and little canals might turn it into an upland Paradise.

How good it was! Glorious air, and the bluest of mountain-tops, some near, some far. One snowy mountain, fresh as though snow had just fallen,

pure, bridal, gleaming, majestic, towered above the rest. Down a neighbouring gorge another giant reared. How many miles away? White snow was pale blue in the distance. Edges were sharp, distinct in the wonderful air under the bluest sky I ever beheld. Ultramarine above our heads, a pale china blue, bright as mosaic on the horizon. Our ponies ambled delightfully. Mine was a red little Lollo that travelled well, but a khud lover. Even on flat paths he persisted on pursuing his way almost over the edge. Baby's Thibetan coolies sang their Thibetan song. The satisfying sense of space was at last upon me.

Down a zig-zag path on an open hill, abrupt in places, the Indian children on foot raced each other over short cuts, blue gauze *sari* and yellow turbans floating behind them on the breeze. Cries of happiness and delight wafted up from them. Glad and pretty they looked as butterflies. While still on the stony slope, a frightening figure stood on the opposite ridge,—enormous, dark, woolly, like a gigantic bear on end.

"Is it a scarecrow?"

"No, a woman in a sheep-skin."

Immense astrachan flaps over her ears spread over the pale stony landscape. Some trick of light and shade multiplied her form.

"But she never moves! She can't be alive! Oh, her hair is fluttering! How frightening!"

So down to a village and the loveliest of valleys. Little field upon field of green, standing barley,

willow-trees and poplars, winding paths, rose-bushes blooming everywhere. Double yellow roses mixed for the first time with pink along the hedges. Gnome-houses with gnome children peered at us from the roofs. Seven of them huddled together on the hillside, but tight, tight, as though hills and slopes for miles around were not offering all the space they could possibly cover.

Every gnome, man, woman or child wore bright roses, yellow or red, often both, tucked like pom-poms into dark, dirty caps. Rippling streamlets, where ponies stopped to drink, abounded as well as the strong, rushing river. A field blazed, too deep a yellow to be mustard; a brilliant sheet against green willows. It goes into curry [1] and is used as a dye. And so we came to the camp.

Tents were up, facing the water, the table was laid, and my new pony-man, keen as a knife on acting as valet. I tried to keep his hands off the bed, for his rags were indescribable, but his purple-brown fingers unlaced my boots, pulled them off and buttoned my shoes. He squatted at the tent-flap, seemed to feel he must not touch the white sheets, but insisted on tucking up the rugs. I hadn't the heart to prevent him, but hoped nothing was tucked up with them.

From my Note-book. Pashkim.

What dining-rooms we have! To-night under a sloping willow-tree at the edge of rippling

[1] Turmeric, the rhizone or rootstock of curcuma longa.

water, flowing through a friendly valley, a snow-peak closes the scene. Paghspa bends over blazing logs, whilst Droma rubs her white back against a tree. Dusk is deepening, river rushing, mountains show bright distinct edges, and little Helen runs out of her tent with a posy, she calls "Isisis," pale blue iris that match her frock and bright eyes.

Later.

The river turns pearly white under blackening willows and boulders. Two golden stars shine above a cold snow-peak. A tent obscures the camp-fire; but its red glow lights leaves and interlacing twigs into fairy fantasy.

CHAPTER XII

June 25th. Pashkim to Mulbek, 16 *miles.*
From my Note-book.

Lollo and I are standing in the shade of a little wood. No, that is wrong. He is standing, I am sitting on his back, plying my pencil, living again the way just come.

Off, alone this time, in morning stillness, Lollo ambling merrily, finishing our last valley, looking back with regret at the happy uplands. One huge tent, but a Marquee, was standing in the Wazir's camp. Later children and dogs appeared on the path, and the dandy with his wife. But no, his wife was riding. It was the Tesildar's comely consort who lifted the curtains, gracefully bending out and bowing, her baby on her knee. The little girl wears a brown *sari* to-day. We pass and repass. She rides cross-legged, saddle-bags behind her, coloured blankets folded upon them, so that she sits on a sort of throne that from the back looks about three yards across. They canter and jog most merrily. The two boys, whipping their steeds, are sometimes with the men, sometimes with the ladies. Apparently their age gives them this privilege, for neither of the others mix. The men

ride in cavalcade ahead ; the women, a gay galaxy in the rear.

We rounded the great hill closing the valley. High up above bits of a great Dard Wall remained, like sockets of ancient teeth.

The valley beyond was bare, morose. Stark slopes met in a stony rivulet where not even water refreshed the eye.

Narrow walls of gorges followed with soon again shining water. The air delicious. Mountains varied in vivid colour of rock and stone. There were no khuds to mention, and where they were my feet turned inward ; while all true Britons should commend Lollo. It is not khud edges he craves but to "keep to the left." To do this he will almost leave the path or pick out jutting stones along the khud. But most of the way this morning my feet turned to the wall, and the only anxiety was lest he left room enough for them, so close did he adhere to the rock—on the left ! So with four-foot path between me and the drop, mightily did I enjoy the narrowing gorge, opening again and again to pleasant villages, paths between stone walls, and multitudes of rosy roses.

Once a woman, dressed in deep browns, made a picture under willows, double yellow roses above her, one on her head, and that lovely yellow that isn't mustard in full flower, waving in a field before her. Wind touched and bowed green heads of bearded wheat. All the flowers we had met were there, only in greater quantities. Milk-white colum-

bine spread lilac outer-skirts and danced with fairy grace. The bell of pale grey-blue grew innumerably, and everywhere roses scattered, pink and yellow, yellow and pink.

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The Dr Sahib arrives, trudging ahead of the others. We are not yet at the bruncheon-place and so I follow him, curbing Lollo to scrawl indecipherable remarks as we go.

Curious coloured rocks scramble about us, close and open, climbing to dusty heights, eye-straining, dazzling, catching the sun, refracting its rays.

Crossing a stream I hear a shout, look to the left, there is the Dr Sahib in, oh, wonderful land!—a Derbyshire dell!

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Great grey boulders strewed a path for a dropping rivulet down a dell. Willow trees threw delicious shade. Rocks marked the curve. Flowers grew close to the river-bed, and to my delight, on a rock wall yet farther down, a curtain of ferns enjoyed the dripping damp.

Little Helen, very exhausted, was put to sleep under a sort of rocky cave. Hardly was she safely off, on her mother's big blue coat, than the Wazir's servants elected to make a fire on the ledge. But they were very careful of the little maid, warning each other to keep still.

Had they been our pony-men in their long dust-coloured clothes, weird head-gear and queer faces,

the little girl might well have awakened to think herself Snow-white and truly among the Dwarfs.

Green leaves shimmered in delicious shade. Three trees made a kind of stage-scene through which the stream dropped to farther trees and boulders.

They told me the next march was to be full of surprises. Most certainly it was. The Mem Sahib kindly rode beside me so that I should miss nothing.

The gorge narrowed, became far more dull, as if to astonish us later the more.

We swerved round a bend. Suddenly there rose up gigantic masses, castellated, torn, splintered. Odd contortions such as painters might dream in distorted nightmare, every rock and mountain yet another colour. The tints reminded me of those hideous bottles of the seaside of my childhood, where variegated sands were arranged in patterns. Nothing hideous here, though weird, majestic, unbelievable, each point rose distinct in the clearest of air. Soft rounded sand-hills lay beneath them, over whose bosoms we travelled easily.

"We are in Lama-land!" she said, and pointed with her switch to an extraordinary, solitary, little white object like a pepper-pot or a square-cut tombstone, topped with a rounded knob.

It was the first chortan or shrine. To go round it a number of times is a sure way of earning merit. At certain times of the year, (late January and February,) mere walking is not sufficient. It has to be a caterpillar progression. Flat on the face, rising up and putting the toes where the face last

lay, flat again, up again, with many a genuflexion and incessant murmured prayer. Wives bring pailfuls of tea and acquire merit in ministering to the devout, who pass the whole day doing this in icy cold weather.

As we rode along one side of the great shelving valley, she told me to turn and see the first Buddhist monastery.

Enormous lumps of rock, rounded and apparently extraneous to the soil, though natural to it, made ledges, almost buildings, temple-like in formation. Into one of these monster ledges doors and windows had been inserted, painted white ; while down below on the sands stood a little, square, white house, belonging to the Abbot.

There next reared before us the most extraordinary mountain scene I ever beheld. It was like a gigantic fort. Miles of the deepest blue extended in mid-air, almost in straight line to drop abruptly, as if cut, at either end. Peaks of other mountains three times tossed up, jagged and brown, in front of this mighty line.

Extraordinary clarity of air made every crevice visible and cut the tops sharp against sky-line.

Pepper-pots or chortans became quite common, adorning the path.

Crazy little flags fluttered off sloping sticks, while flat stones, piled upon each other, showed yet another way of gaining merit.

Another bend. We saw afar a monastery, perched like an eyrie on the summit of a cliff, rising

sheer from the ground, about five or six hundred feet high, about one-third as broad. Up from the earth sprang this immense excretion, topped with tall houses, flat-roofed, white-faced, with short red ornamentation, three to five stories of windows in lines.

We saw this wonder sprout from the earth, then lost it again as we wended our way in and out of low valleys, studded with small earth-houses and meadows. People, exactly like pictures of the prehistoric, stared at us from fields, shaggy, covered with wild hair, skins of beasts fastened loosely round their necks, ragged dark clothes beneath. Some trick of atmosphere made them look enormous, not mere dots, as people often do among the mountains. Even their features looked huge and the great stick implement upon which they leant.

We had passed from May to March in a few hours. Barley, three feet high in the valleys left behind, was just pricking through the earth.

At last we turned a great green shoulder, the monastery reared in air, high above us. Beneath was a green lawn, the polo ground, stretching between bungalow and boulder-strewn river-bed. Once more we had arrived.

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Mulbek. (*Also known as Maulba Chamba*).

Never in this life have I more wanted to explore. Touched, no doubt, by the high altitude, half-crazy for want of sleep, my tent was up in the high

wind, a good distance across the green, away from the noisy bungalow. Lulled by wind and rustle of water I slept away those precious hours, rising for dinner, this time in daylight, and so to bed.

Woke in the night to find rain pouring, got up, closed flaps, piled clothes upon the bed, spread mackintosh on top, rolled in again and slept till awakened in grey dawn.

On once more.

CHAPTER XIII

June 26th. Mulbek to Bod Karbu, 16½ miles.

A SHOCK greeted us at breakfast.

"Helen cannot go on to-day," the Mem Sahib announced. "She's tired out. She's sick and has got a temperature."

"I'll see her," the Dr Sahib said.

He went into the room she had shared with her mother in the bungalow. The Wazir's family had the other.

He came out, walked over to the deck-chairs, chose two, had them strapped, flat all their length, to two long tent poles. He did it very grimly.

"Dear!" his wife pleaded.

"Everything has gone on," he said. "We must follow."

"What do things matter to the life of the child?"

He went in, came out, carrying a pale, unprotesting little bundle.

"Now lie down, dearie. Get cosy and go to sleep."

"She must have her medicine."

She poked up a patient little mouth.

Up went the tiny litter on four stalwart shoulders, away on the high stony path, looking dreadfully

like something else that is carried on men's shoulders.

One could not bear to see the slant of it.

Heavy-hearted without the little comrade I turned away to choose, actually to choose, between two ponies; and did well with a stout grey cob, Roly-Poly. He rolled and ambled along cosily, as if under an abbot of old.

But what a ride!

Low hills were easily traversed by wide sandy paths.

These extraordinary mountains! Rocks rise vertically out of dust as if chiselled and placed there.

One, like an enormous cone, had a big figure, Chamba, carved upon its base. High above on its apex, a staff upon a ridiculous little lump of stone on the forehead of the rock was tilted forward, as these folk alone could crazily tilt it, flinging a slanting white parasol far out overhead. A few paces farther nine pepper-pot shrines reared side by side; while over the valley stood something to be seen to be believed. Another upstanding enormous rock, high as a mighty cathedral, divided of itself into huge rounded chunks, piled each on other, quite tipsily, each bearing resemblance to a droll goblin face.

It was as if some giant baker baking loaves had jammed them while still soft one upon another, a tower of Babel out of bread, sticking his thumb roughly in the face of each to indicate foolish eyes, nose and mouth. Down about the base of this

mighty column, white houses with flat, red roofs, very Italian, piled, tucked and poked, every eyelet window with meaning in its glance.

Since reaching Lama-land we have been passing disjointed rocks, like prehistoric statues, with the oddest resemblances, quite natural and all uncarved. A sheep, a gargoyle, an old man bent under a bundle and once a clumsy Virgin and child. Prayer-flags on tilting-sticks, prayer-wheels on roof tops set up on end with wings beneath to catch the wind and whirl them, bundles of stuff, long strips of muslin, words printed on them, adorn houses and shrines. These goblin people have found a goblin religion.

Little Helen was sitting up on the ground on her flat deck-chair drinking clear water the Dr Sahib, on his knee at her side, had fetched from a brook. Choskyid and the basket-cot were beyond her. Stopping Roly-Poly I saw with joy that colour had come again to her cheeks. She had slept every inch of the way. Lovely air and overcast sky could only do her good. The short time the sun shone, it well let us know how merciless it could be.

We had already traversed many kinds of scenery, samples collected from widely differing parts of the earth. Suddenly to-day I was alone in the great Sahara. Rolling sand-hills spread around.

A saddle-back between peaks, no snow this time, but soft, brittle, sandy soil, led up to another Pass. Once more the Wazir and all his party cantered by. One of the boys beat Roly-Poly to a gallop. My pony-man had fallen behind. These men all wear

dust-coloured woolly boots, for all the world like those ugly-shaped, sewn bed-socks that always fall off in the night. When they really mean work they pull off these woolly mufflers, tuck them in their sash and run on bare feet; otherwise they rock along, tumbling rather than walking from foot to foot. Roly-Poly's man stuck to his boots all day, so I saw but little of him.

On and on we went till the defile narrowed and went up and up. Quite easily we mounted. Flowers I had never seen before blossomed on rocky slabs beside us. The flower, bright as cyclamen, already met, clung tightly to the dust. A yellow flower rose above crisp, sappy leaf, curling like parsley. A mauve to purple flower was there, rather like clover, yet distinctly not. Some had already blossomed, threw up dry skeletons of scattered seed-pods on long stems from close-lying leaves, gummed to brown earth. Once I saw stonecrop, white and flowering, but too far off to be sure of its kind. Up and up, zig-zagging; the Wazir stopped his horse to breathe and all his little cortège of men stopped too.

At last; but a view!

Thirteen thousand feet high, billows and billows of mountain lay beneath a few feet of top. Worlds stretched on either side. Immediately below lay rolls and rolls of earth, browny-yellow to green, rounded like hills on the Scottish Border; but beyond! Mountains that were grey, but yet shone opalescent, —mauve, pink and silver. Beyond again yet mightier tops, deep, dark blue, but dark, dark

blue . . . serrated all the skyline, rising, dipping, spreading to infinity.

On the utmost summit was an absurd little cairn of stones with a forlorn little ragged, tipping flag. This is the sacred *Lato* and luck flag.

I stopped on Roly-Poly's back to sketch it. A shout warned Paghspa that the Wazir had lost his horse, a big grey stallion. Rejoicing in freedom he raced back up the mountain side. Paghspa sprang from his pony and ran towards him. He eluded Paghspa, came on to me. Terrified lest our ponies should catch his wild action, I dropped off Roly-Poly and snatched both his reins and Paghspa's pony.

The stallion went clean over the hill-top, higher than the path, and got away.

I went on with my sketch. Fingers, trembling with excitement, made good serrated edges.

Then down and down and down, until at last we left the gorge, and looking back from flat valley, saw its gates, purple, magenta, brown, overlapping, closing, rising to narrow majestic heights, as might the gates to infernal regions. On over the wide green opening valley, through flat-roofed weird mud-houses, rag-flagged. Yet another conical-shaped high rock reared across the valley, queer houses perched upon it. At last came the village. The villagers all turned out pell-mell upon each other to greet the Wazir. What they thought of me riding ahead I do not know.

"Salaam! Salaam!"

Bod Karbu.
From my Note-book.

I am sitting under a stone wall in the light shade of a swaying poplar. A prehistoric creature is squatting beside me, for I called her over, attracted by her appearance. A flat piece of red-covered stuff, studded with great bumps of turquoise, shaped somewhat like a small crocodile's skin, is pointed over her brow and falls half down her back. Rolls of coral beads are attached as a sort of side-show, while brooches and huge clamps of chased silver mark where it turns over the brow. Over her ears stick far out two big flaps, black, of some sort of fur or woolly stuff I do not like to touch. Her hair falls beneath in two stiff plaits plaited into innumerable ends of black wool that finally meet below the waist, so the lower part resembles a sort of dark net. More ornaments round her neck are of coral, turquoise and silver, and hang on black strings. Hoops of seed pearls make big pendant earrings. She smiles in friendly fashion, lighting up a plain, honest face.

On the bank beneath the wall under my hand grow—I thought they were violets, but they are not, though exactly their colour and texture. It is a double-lipped flower, the lower lip protruding, growing out of a green cup. No scent.[1] Little leaves look juicy. I never saw it before in my life. Belladonna grows in patches. Flat fields spread,

[1] Probably a butter-wort, though not so graceful as in Scotland.

wheat is beginning to sprout. Behind the fields rears the great jagged mountain wall, snow clinging sheerly down great crevices.

Later.

The Mem Sahib and I went down the village after tea. We were a sight for them all. Eagerly they clustered to look at us.

"A man behind you is closely examining your fur," she said.

Hearing a tinkle, thinking something had dropped from my sketching-bag, I stooped down, saw nothing and moved on.

"Now they'll all look," she said.

We turned. The whole mass, men and women, were on the spot, peering at the ground.

Photography is maddening. The sun of course would only come out in glints, beautifying the landscape. We wanted the whole valley, above all, the distant spike of upright rock, to which towers and houses clung. Also the far village, so Italian in look, clustering with white-faced houses and red roofs at the foot of a round hill, also the big white pepper-pot chortan, and, quite near us, the flat roof of a house edged with dark fuzzy-wuzzy thorn, extraordinary little flag-rags hanging off forlorn drooping sticks. A girl and a goat stood upon it.

Turning round we found a swarm had quietly collected behind us. A woman's face crooked oddly out of a corner, where a house-wall vertically cut a horizontal roof-top.

The Wazir, seated in a chair in the yard, handsome worked bronze and silver hookah high on the ground beside him, was holding a little court.

He told me that the small procession met that morning on the winding path over the sand-hills beneath the Pass had been a bride, fetched from Baltistan by a gentleman from the Punjaub.

Three men had ridden ahead in solitary file. Each gave a solemn "Salaam." A short way behind rode a young woman astride, her face hidden in shawl, keeping *purdah*, though one merry brown eye peeped out. Two serving women, faces exposed, followed her. He, too, had noticed the gay brown eye she cocked out of the corner of her crossed shawl.

Crowds stood about the yard. They came for disputes to be settled.

"Theft?" I asked.

"Oh! no. There is hardly any crime. Land disputes mostly."

"And wife disputes?"

He laughed.

"Yes, many of those! And the worst to settle!"

Up and down the verandah a man in pigtail carried the Wazir's youngest child, looking exactly as our men must have looked towards the close of the eighteenth century. The pig-tail was short and very full under a well-shaped hat, puce velvet crown with turned-up astrachan flaps, almost three-cornered. A good fitting coat of pale dust-coloured, hand-made stuff, collar and cuffs of puce

velvet, trousers, tight-fitting as leggings, tucked into high open boots. He held the little one tenderly under a black alpaca umbrella. It wore a short frock of puce-coloured silk, matching his cuffs.

A disturbed night in a back room off the Mem Sahib's, looking into the yard. A servant snored on a shrill high note. A cat mewed and cat chase promptly followed. Dogs, men, boys, all the yard alive, yelling, screaming, moving, throwing. Trashie later complained that a cat sat down on his face and that started the commotion.

Long before dawn a noise that would arouse the dead at doomsday steadily increased in volume and persistency.

CHAPTER XIV

June 27th. Bod Karbu to Lamayuru, 15 miles.

But the freshness of the glorious air! Another overcast day. Once more had the chance to choose a pony and called him Taggart, for he was all rags and tatters, but the best steady traveller had yet. Was much alone, leaving the man behind me, as Taggart ambled after and tried to keep up with the Wazir's young son, graceful on his grey steed.

All the horses have neighed.

"They do it to be joyful," Helen explained, early on the route. "It's their way of singing."

Taggart did not do it to be joyful; but when he was badly scared at finding himself alone, he screeched, screamed, engine-whistled and syren-yelled. He even tried to bolt backwards to regain the others.

It was another long gorge, led up to by wide valley and pleasant paths, only khuddie for short spells. On a good horse one could shorten by canters. As we came up and up, hills grew yet more weird, like those Biblical, fantastic pictures with awful jagged rocks and hitherto believed impossible precipices.

But the stillness !

I never can be glad enough I was alone to hear it.

Taggart's turnover of a pebble sounded like a gun.

On and on, up and up, over yellow-greenish slopes under mighty towers of cliffs. By heaven's own mercy there was no blazing sun.

The Dr Sahib said he disliked that march and one could understand it. Though, if quite alone among them, the mighty heights spoke with the tongue of men and of angels.

At last I came upon Paghspa in a dried water-bed, one small rivulet, clear as crystal, trickling down the centre. Solitary lumps of rock, exactly like mush-rooms, grouped irregularly on the bank opposite.

" Look, Daddy, at that mountain ! " Helen exclaimed, when awakened from sleep, dropped on the ground in her litter, she joined us for hot tea and food. " It's more bigger than any others."

A change had come over our Helen. She clung to Choskyid. She was less grown up. Now she was carried, she felt she must be a nursery-child.

Brunch devoured, once more upward to the Pass, always thinking the steep proclivity ahead would bring the summit, only to find another, winding upwards, till, (indeed, it is a surprising tour amid scenes gathered from all over the world,) a gentle breast of the South Downs rose. Short green turf, and on it, unbelievable, gorse !

Gorse it was not, though it looked exactly like it : dark, close to the ground in patches.

My pony-man picked some with difficulty. It

had a short dark leaf and was covered with prickly thorns. The flower was exactly like ours, but had no scent. A pretty, little, close white and mauve flower, rather like stonecrop, grew close beside it. Yet another flower appeared, mauve velvet at the end of a long stem, sprouting from grey velvet leaves.

Down one of the side gulleys, gentle and rounded as on the South Downs, I saw a yak grazing peacefully by himself. His tail bulged out like a huge fly-flapper. Earlier in the day Choskyid had tried to tell me she saw a Sharpu, the big mountain sheep.

Up and up, 13,400 feet, until at last the *Lato* or pile of jagged stones, crowned with prayer-flag, showed us the summit.

I turned to see the vast spread behind us. Sleet beat in my face. Billows rose of blue mountains. Clouds covered distant snow.

My pony-man stepped on one side, faced the way he had come, saluted and prayed.

The Mem Sahib asked if I heard him say :—

"Sola! Sola! Sola!"

I did not, but saw he was giving thanks.

The other side was wonderful as the last. Down and down and down. I did not dismount. The path was good but long. Rough earth all about us. Scuds of hailstones beat our backs. Frost rime rested lightly on earth and rocks.[1]

[1] This was not frost-rime, on the return one saw much of it; some substance, possibly saline, worked up through the earth, giving the appearance of hoar-frost.

THE TOP OF THE PASS
(LATO AND LUCK FLAG)

Paghspa overtook me. He too gets on a rock to mount, but would I could emulate his speed! On foot he gives the pony a crack with his whip, speeding him down the path, runs after, overtakes, passes him, leaps on a rock, spreads off it, wide as an eagle, arms and legs outstretched, plump into the middle of the cantering pony's back; all in one continuous, unbroken movement.

A strange kind of rocky formation rose high to the left as we descended. Sharp projections followed close on each other, so the huge cliff looked like mighty back-teeth in a shark's jaw, standing up to bite.

Flowers ceased. In their place pebbles at our feet took wonderful colours. Purple, jade, heliotrope, green, and little slabs of pale blue. A clear rill of running water turned them to jewels, opaque instead of crystal. Still the mountains threw jagged peaks to the sky. Still I thanked God that sun did not shine, turned a corner and screamed aloud, though all alone, with joy and wonder. Is there another place on the whole earth so odd, so utterly unexpected?

"Curiouser and curiouser!" as Alice said.

Bright blue mountains flung up spike-like peaks. Ranges beneath them were brown to purple. A vast mountain rock rose vividly to the front of all, a knob that might have been cut by a giant, crowned by a tall monastery, white and rosy against distant hills, yet rising as if one with the very rock. Every slit of a window peered. Tall were its walls.

Whoever imagined houses six stories high in Thibet? I had thought of a kind of bee's-wax of huddled mud-huts. Down dropped the rock wall, faced in with huge black holes, criss-crossed like vast windows. Two smaller hills, house-crowded, reared at its base. A short plain stretched beneath packed with rows of chortans. A long Mani wall came to meet us made of piles of loose stones, hung out with prayer-flags.

Hobgoblinery was in every peak, stone, brown house, flag and peering window. Never was place so uncannily alive. It did not look possible without ladders to reach the eyrie-perch of the Lamasery. The only habitation looking stolid and dull was the mud Dak Bungalow beneath on the flat plain.

Each stone on the long Mani wall, loose-lying, was beautifully engraved with the holy words :— "*Om mani padme hum.*"

If you keep the wall on the right every little stone silently sends up its prayer for you. Crooked, ricketty, reared a crazy pile above it. The prayer-rag on the top could only have been poised on so meaning a stick by an elf.

. . . . . .

Lamayuru.

Down before the Dak Bungalow pony-men in prehistoric clothes dodged the camera, fearing the evil eye. Girls under turquoise tails, tight bunches of flowers in hand, grouped on a bank under the

LAMAYURU

immense rock pile, culminating in the Lamasery. Lamas in red, brown, crimson, purple, conversed in groups under tall walls.

Helen came with me to speak to two. It was astounding to hear how the language came back to the little girl as they chatted. The eighteenth century pig-tailed gentleman piously touched the forehead of one with his own. They eagerly told us we must climb the height.

From my Note-book.

Have just been up to the monastery. Puffed and stopped breathless every few yards to the joyous wonder of troglodytes, who, polite but curious, rallied around me and suffered from amusement they hardly knew how to conceal when I stumbled over a stone. Lamas, peering from above, beheld me, left roof-tops, came down in claret-coloured clothes to meet me under a high gateway. They kindly offered me a stone as a seat on account of my panting. All closed round to closely examine the fur on my arm, the parrot on my parasol handle.

On, up through very dungeony stairs and passages where I met an extraordinary smell, beyond me to decide what caused it. Out on to a broken, steep staircase, sheer over the plain below, and under a three-storied house. Each stair was the steepest I ever met. The length of leg they required! Good exercise for the knee. Here, again, I sat upon one of them, and my audience was openly delighted

with the merry spectacle of the Dr Sahib chasing a pi-dog, far down below, from the now minute bungalow. Up again and under the next doorway met by the real Lama or Abbot himself. A courteous, sweet-looking, elderly gentleman.

He took the camera from my hand, led me under high walls, through a dark entrance, up more hugely, high stairs, into a courtyard, where red-brown priests looked down from the roof above, and so into the darkened Temple.

Long strips of carpet led between painted wooden pillars to a row of Buddhas, raised on a shallow daïs on the far side. A central gallery closed square above, where the only light entered, save from the dim door, and was further obscured by hanging flags, suspended silks, skirts, banners and highly coloured stuffs, making darkness beneath yet more mysterious.

Two or three handsome figures of the Buddha I first observed, small brass pots in rows before them, a flickering light, a little incense. Beyond was an image looking like a Pope, seated not in orthodox, but in European fashion on a chair, his two hands turned one in, one out. Then came a perfect forest of Buddhas, small and large, bronze, wood and composite. On the farther wall were rows of cubby-holes, each holding a curious box-like thing, a foot and a half in length. I wondered if they were slabs containing manuscript and learnt afterwards I was right.

I stood and sniffed surreptitiously, having always

LAMAYURU. THE ABBOT HIMSELF CAME TO MEET ME.

heard of bad smells. There was only a faint, far from unpleasing odour, slightly reminiscent of boiling jam. Far more remarkable was the blend of darkened atmosphere. Light striking across coloured flags from the heightened inner window threw Rembrandtesque shades, deep colours, dim darknesses upon the group of monks and nuns, (*jomos*,) also dressed in red-brown, now standing within the doorway gazing interest on me.

Outside we wandered to see curious little cubicle houses thrust in a wall. Before them were shrines, prayer-flags and objects in a row looking like scarecrows, long poles with petticoats, no doubt of holy portent.

A little lower down was an open court. Buddhas were painted in a row under a verandah in bright blues, reds and greens, ornamented with arabesque patterns.

At another doorway, this time leading out sideways on to the hillside, I paused and asked if they used in meditation the word " Aum," or always the full sentence, "*Aum mani padme hum!*" Though I can hardly hope they understood.

A smile illuminated the face of the Abbot.

He folded his hands beneath his habit and intoned in long, low tones and half-notes, exactly like a Roman Catholic priest, the holy phrase. First he did this alone, then signed to the others. They all took it up and were humming and intoning, like deep notes of an organ.

We parted pleasantly. I came down a hill so

steep I could as easily have stepped on a roof as on the path.

Written later, when I knew more.

We had left the outskirts and were right in the heart of Lama land, nowhere more fantastically and certainly than in Lamayuru.

Political authority was vested in this monastery in those early ages when small nations around were ruled by kings.

It had been a centre of the earlier *Bon Chos* religion, an imaginative and spirited kind of animism, long before the philosophy of Gautama, the Buddha, reached the land and succeeded in tincturing with new life its original doctrines. Of these one may read :—

"The world consists of three great realms, the land of the gods, or Heaven, which is of white colour; the land of men or earth, of red colour; and the land of the water-spirits, or lower world, of blue colour.

"There is a King reigning in Heaven as well as in the under-world; but the greatest in power on the earth is the earth-mother. There is a huge tree, the tree of the world" (of life ?) "growing through all the realms. It has root in the under-world and its highest branches in Heaven. The King of Heaven is asked to send one of his sons as King to the earth, and around the story of the missions of the youngest son of the King of Heaven to the earth, the national epic of Thibet in general and western Thibet in particular has grown up."[1]

Beautiful as this is, with strange resemblance to a religion better known to us, there is a dark, grim

[1] The Rev. A. N. Francke, "A History of Western Thibet."

side to Bon Chos, now interwoven with so-called Buddhism, the placating of fierce and awesome gods with loathly sacrifice.

Not long ago a missionary doctor and his wife, seated on the bungalow verandah, were visited by two Lamas. They came with the gruesome request that the doctor should save them human flesh for sacrifice upon their altars.

. . . . . .

Down at the bungalow the Mem Sahib and I agreed as to the rush of tourists that would arrive armed with kodaks, if only they could come by train to a big hotel of hot baths and German waiters.

Happily Mother-earth still hides a few nestlings in her mighty lap.

Little Helen, quite her best self, enjoyed her supper at six o'clock and offered her father a motor-drive on the verandah.

From the window of my room I glanced at grim, mountain walls. Not only had we slid back centuries, but had reached the far confines of earth, blocked in, closed away by awe-inspiring environment.

" Where do you want to go, Daddy ? " the fresh little voice outside was asking in the deepening dusk of Lamayuru.

" To London ! "

" What, to London-town ? "

" Yes, to London-town."

" Then we shall be there in half an hour ! "

CHAPTER XV

June 28th. Lamayuru to Kalatze, 10 *miles.*

But we have done nothing, seen nothing, been nowhere, until to-day, so does this march sink all else into insignificance!

Had a stumbly pony I called Hockster, higher behind than before, which gave him an awful movement, and a nice cheery pony-man, whose face reminded me of an old school friend.

We dropped down deep gorges between enormous clefts of mountains. Paths and water-courses exchanged places. Impossible to say down which we were scrambling; they were either or both at the same moment, down, down so deep, penetrating to the bowels of the earth, while overhead soared rock-walls so high, the sun could not reach us but for a few moments. Down to a little stream, boulder-strewn, in and out, winding among the short flat of it among rocks, now this side, now that, hardly a path, but our way marked by the water. Then up on to khuds. Threads of paths blasted on rock walls. Helen's litter slanted, high up, straight above my head, her four men on different level. She was carried backwards. Khud cut sheer beneath them.

Ceaselessly they sang their cheery song. One began, the others answered. Where they found the breath it was impossible to guess.

No one can give me the exact words; but this is what it sounded like, in their short, cloppity, queer tongue :—

" Are you happy ? "
" We are happy,
Happy, happy."
" Is she safe ? "
" Little Lady,
She is safe !
Safe—safe—safe ! "
" Are you happy ? "
" We are happy,
Happy, happy."
" Is she safe ? "

They shouted their song. Walls, turrets, rock oddities took it up on all sides. A thousand unseen hobgoblins shouted it back, each one merrier than the last.

Round projecting rocks, down declivities they disappeared, their voices died away, yet still hobgoblins far, far above head shouted their song in laughing echoes.

Paths were frequently broken or littered with stones. Shale had slipped right across in places. Why crossing it, ever so gingerly, should make shale slip up above I do not know, one would expect it to slip beneath, but long yards loosened overhead. Happy to get over before the loosening reached the path ! Sickening to see stones slip swiftly beneath

and splash into the river. Think of a moving staircase, multiply it immensely and cross it obliquely. Just as well the young parents, bringing up the rear, did not see the precious cot rock and sway, rest against slippery shale, then reel drunkenly and stagger once more on straight path into position.

Choskyid was mistress of the hour. Short whip in hand, shoulder to cot, or on her horse again, shouting to me to dismount and Helen's men to come on, she was sign and symbol of all that woman can be. Always kind, always smiling, and always right.

And again we dipped down into the cool rush of that lovely baby-stream with little white frills of wavelets, innocent and fresh, as that other blessed one, sleeping on wild hillsides oblivious of danger.

Soon the wee rivulet would join, mingle, nay, be the mighty Indus, bearing water of life to teeming multitudes.

Was I dreaming ? Following a ragged Ladakhi, who had never known of my existence yesterday, through dim, deep gorges, enormous rock cliffs rearing high above us, while we picked our steps among stones, awed by their mighty presence. They threw off gigantic upstanding splinters, towers of fairy castles that did not exist. It was as though we were wandering into veritable mountains of imagination. On the slant of high rocky path we peeped giddily over to see spires of rock stretching up slenderly to meet us. Flowers were still with us, those yellow in colour predominated, and now a straggling plant threw pale green tendrils

over rude, black shale, tossing off an exquisite blossom, something like St John's Wort, only purely white with six waxen petals, holding a feathery mist of snowy freshness.

Over a small bridge we crossed our now lustily roaring rivulet. A few moments later it sprang from the dark gorge into the strong Indus, cutting impetuous way through deep alluvial down the centre of an opening valley. Turning the bend we faced the torrent of the Indus and were quickly out on the broiling sunshine of the desert.

And of all queer, grotesque statuary thrown up into familiar shapes by Dame Nature's own chisel, here, where mountain range projected to the river on the final point, sat Queen Victoria, cut in rock, shawl and widow cap complete, forever regarding the river as if blessing its waters, bearing life to her children.

But that desert was hot, stony, pebbly! One huge rock " in a weary land " threw grateful shade. On and on, over the dry plain, until we turned to the left, crossed it directly, once more approaching the Indus. Not until actually on the high bank above the deep bed it had cut could we see a wonderful fairy-tale castle, plump and square, with solid, yellow, bastioned walls and rising towers, straight from the crusades or the land where Jack-the-Giant-Killer performed his exploits.

It lay on the opposite bank, guarding the bridge, now of substantial modern workmanship.

I got down from my pony and sketched it.

Up the rocky path came the prettiest herd of

tiny, dainty goats. The goat-herd boy passed with them but returned to my side.

I looked up to find him handing my green veil, (I did not know it was dropped,) with a bow and smile worthy of the youngest son, out to seek fortune and win the hand of the princess.

Written later.

King Naglug built Castle Bragnag to protect the first bridge over the Indus, a most important piece of property on the direct route between India and Central Asia. As those who used it were taxed, it brought in a substantial revenue, and King Naglug placed a curse upon whomsoever should attempt to destroy it :—

" Whoever thinks evil of it in his heart,
Let his heart rot !
Whoever stretches his hand toward it,
Let his hand be cut off !
Whoever harms it with his eye,
May his eye become blind.
Whoever does any harm to that bridge,
May that creature be born in Hell ! " [1]

This is the land of Dards. Dards and Mons are Aryan. It is written :—" You cannot force labour on a Dard, just as you cannot put a load on a dog." Dards kept up the game of polo after the Persians let it fall into disuse, and were the link that brought it down to this day.

About 950 A.D. chroniclers of Ladakh made the record :—

[1] "History of Western Thibet." Dr A. D. Francke.

"At that time Upper Ladakh was held by the descendants of Cesar, (Kesar,) whilst lower Ladakh was split up into various independent principalities."

"At Leh there reigned a dynasty of kings, who derived their origin from the mythical King Kesar."[1]

Although this was Lower Ladakh, and not in the possession of the mythical king, so well does this legend of him fit with Castle Bragnag I cannot forbear from relating it here.

"Kesar goes to the North to conquer the giants of the North. Bruguma, (his wife,) who wants to accompany him, is sent back. After many difficulties Kesar arrives before the giant's castle, but does not find the giant at home. The giant's wife takes him in and both have a happy time together. The giant's approach is indicated by an earthquake and Kesar is hid by the lady in a hole underneath the ground. Although the giant smells at once the presence of a human being he is pacified by his wife and induced to go to sleep. When he is fast asleep Kesar is brought out of the hole and kills the giant."

Yet another treasure, culled from the same authority,[1] is :—

BRUGUMA'S FAREWELL TO KESAR.

"Oh! my clever king!
When thou goest to the upper land of the gods,
And seest all the fairies of Heaven,
Then do not forget thy wife from the land of men.

"Oh! my wise lord!
When thou goest to the upper land of the gods,
And seest all the fairies of Heaven,
Then do not forget thy wife from the land of men.

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[1] "History of Western Thibet." Dr A. D. Francke.

"Oh! my clever king!
When thou goest to the lower land of the nixies,
And seest all the lady-nixies of it,
Then do not forget thy wife from the land of men.

"Oh! my wise lord!
When thou goest to the lower land of nixies,
And seest all the beauties among its ladies,
Then do not reject thy helpmate from the land of men."

Well might she have warned him when he visited the giants of the North:—

"Oh! my clever king, oh! my wise lord,
When thou goest to the Castle of the giants of the North,
And seest . . ."

But then he might never have slain the giant who lived in a castle like Bragnag.

. . . . . .

Lamayuru to Khalatze.

Up again on to Hockster. He wriggled his hocks across the hanging bridge above the black deep torrent and bore me up the path through a door in the great, yellow wall into narrow alleys and winding ways of Castle Bragnag. The trade route led right through it, out of its big gates and on to the desert on the far side.

Green trees waved alluringly. Beneath them sheltered the straggling village of Khalatze and the Christian Mission house, whence issued a welcoming woman, neatly dressed in handsome

dark cloth, exquisite with gold and turquoise ornaments, chased silver cuffs, in all the glory of her countryside.

Mistaking me for one better, she offered me a big bunch of fragrant leaves off a tree, met yesterday for the first time. I gesticulated to show she was coming.

When the Mem Sahib arrived, through the door in the wall to the Mission in the midst of a big delicious orchard of green apricot trees, standing knee-deep in grass and lucerne, she waved them in her hand.

" Is it eucalyptus ? " I asked. They had a little yellow blossom.

" Might be," she replied, inhaling their perfume, " but better ! Eucalyptus and lavender mixed."

. . . . . .

June 28th. Khalatze to Nurla, 8 miles.

After early tea in the pleasant garden we set forth in the cool of the afternoon.

Nearly a mile of green village proved the pleasantest part of the ride.

Bearded wheat stood full height, though still green, apricot trees dispersed above it. Large walnut and mulberry trees threw shade. All yield much fruit.

There are two crops a year in this happy valley, first barley, then turnips or wheat.

Men in good clothes stared leisurely after us, dark, blue cloth caps lined and turned up with

stylish red peaks. Dark sashes swathed their bodies in the low line I first saw worn by Sarah Bernhardt. Strips of dark braid, matching hat and sash, bound pieces of dust-coloured felt, the same colour as their long clothes, about their legs. All were hand-spun, hand-woven. Rags were worn on the top, preserving good clothes beneath. An improvement on the custom of others. Patches were sewn on, very large and overlapping to provide greater warmth to the garment.

The long Mani or prayer wall jutted from fields to stoniness, so exactly like the desert traversed in the morning, for an instant I thought I had lost my bearings and was returning the way we had come; but then saw a path, but a road, an esplanade upon the farther hill and knew this was something never seen before. Paths widened, but scenery grew tamer, though mountains were always about us. As for traffic, after the solitude we seemed to rival Pall Mall. Goodly company too. And the snowy white flower stayed faithfully with us. The Mem Sahib's coolie gave her its Ladakhi name, but spoke contemptuously :—" No use ! "

" It is beautiful ! "

He saw no use in beauty.

First we met a handsome elderly Indian, head of this branch of Public Works Department, riding along the road with his little daughter, whom he proudly introduced, with a train of attendants.

Then came an Indian gentleman, his little son perched in front of him, both on a fifteen-hand

horse. He swerved into the stones off the path to let me pass.

An odd procession followed a little farther back. An Indian servant came on the top of a pack-pony, legs hanging forward off the baggage as if on an elephant.

Behind him two young girls were coyly hidden in floating yards of soft veil, both cross-legged on the same pony. Two boys were astride the next. They salaamed like young soldiers, swinging arms at full length from their young bodies, swaying lightly on their trotting pony. Bringing up the rear was a fine old lady, completely lost to sight in a white sheet—*purdah*. But some peep-hole must have let her know I was a woman and alone, for she swung it widely open, gave me the smile and bow of a queen, then shut herself up like a box.

The next little procession was a romance.

A boyish-looking Thibetan was followed by a bonny, rosy young girl, with gorgeous turquoise crocodile over her forehead and down her back, overlapping two, wide, black fuzzy wings. The old man following with very benign face and a younger one, I heard later were servants.

The boy was now thirteen, the girl his bride and a little older than he. Two years ago he fetched her from her father's house, the king of Linashed. They were now returning to her home on a visit. He was the son of a Ladakhi nobleman who traded with Lhasa. When I exclaimed at their youth, I was told girls of twelve are often mothers.

Next we climbed a long khud, overhanging the Indus, sober as a young man with much before him. Hills were low and scenery was comparatively tame.

Then we reached the green of another village, but had to pass beneath its level, out of sight of refreshing meadows, along a stony path dropped to the river. Small stone walls overhead hid from view barley but a few inches high. The growth was again months back on this wind-swept height.

At last we rose to the smallest of bungalows, and gained the view up and down the valley. Exquisite green spread on either side. A huge rose-bush in the distance was rosy with roses.

What comfort in this queer country are these little, sheltering houses; roof that keep off sun, doors and windows open, giving clear draught of mountain air, solid chairs, tables and beds.

Little Helen had picked up pretty, flat, green or blue stones wherever her coolie-men laid down her litter to rest.

THE LITTER, THE COT, AND CHOSKYID.

CHAPTER XVI

June 29th. Nurla to Saspul, 14½ miles.

Got up fresh and vigorous, able to cope with all things, particularly bedding, which rolled up quite slim again.

Most of the ponies were kept on from the last march, sorely against the will of their men. But I found a new pony, already saddled, but little more than a foal. All its soft baby hair was still thick in its ears. As for looks, he might have been Mr Brown's grandson.

No sooner started than I perceived he inherited all his possible parent's ways. His walk was the walk of death. His jog-trot hit the heavens and bumped the stony earth. But his canter, the merriest little lamblike scamper that ever could be known. Luckily there was sandy soil; at one time so flat and even one might be donkey-riding on English sands.

But there were khuds.

We never left the river Indus, sometimes passing it on stony plains, sometimes on paths cut on cliffs. An even hush was in its rapid rush, as though the solemnity of deep purpose filled its eager youth. For the first time I cantered up khuds and found

it by far the safest way. When the pony diddle-doddled along the edge one knew where fore-legs were, but never the hind. In cantering, the crisp motion bound all four little legs compactly together. Toddles of himself kept the middle of the path.

Over the far side of the river lay green ledges of bright green barley, indescribably glad against yellow, rocky glare.

So endless it seemed, I wondered had I gone off on some strange track? Particularly when green fields and streamlets appeared on the far bank . . . but no, there had been no bridge. The pony-man was far behind. Holding on just a little farther, the path abruptly ended. We looked into space. Too much for Toddles. He stopped dead.

Relentlessly I drove him round a boulder, guessing the path was there. It was. A steep, sharp slope down to a stream. The babies, Paghspa and the pony-man sat in the glare of a torrid sun.

I got off, went forward to lead Toddles. Never have I seen such terror and horror as in his beautiful brown-blue eyes on beholding me! He stopped, dragged backwards, pulled, tried to turn round.

I got behind him and drove him on. He fled as if pursued by the Evil One, clattering down the stony path.

I yelled to pony-men to stop him and sauntered down to Ooly Drogpo.

No, I have not invented that name. I could not

HELEN ON CHOSKYID'S PONY.

if I tried. I have sat down on Ooly Drogpo and thought it odious.

But presently when tea was hot, the gentle tinkle of running brook audible, grass green in tiny patches on its glaring banks, while sweet roses grew on little bushes, the Mem Sahib heartened us by saying :—

"If anyone funked these ponies, they would shortly be defunct."

Just beyond Ooly Drogpo Choskyid stopped her procession for a snap-shot to be taken. But little Helen was so upset at the needless indignity of being photographed on a litter that, a little farther on, amends were made by taking her on Choskyid's pony on another piece of open ground.

Farther on, once more alone, I found Toddles did suffer from khud sense.

Again we came out on a high ledge that seemed to lead nowhere. The Indus boiled and bubbled in its own business-like way sheer beneath us. The ledge looked fairly wide until Toddles began to jib, refuse, back, shift hind-legs, (oh, those hind-legs !), declining to turn the great boulder hiding the path from sight.

Somehow I shoved him round it, though it is wonderful how tender-hearted one grows about the stick at such moments ! Round the corner, we were on a mere ledge beside a deep drop, still he dared not advance, and I dared not slip off his back and go to his head ; for the overpowering terror of the sight of me—mercifully he forgot what I looked like when away upon his back—might have

finished things. We may have been two full minutes on that ledge, it felt like ten. There was fine, rugged rock scenery and seething water far beneath us. I took no artistic interest in either.

We dropped to water's level and up a milder khud, joined by Paghspa. I cantered it after him. Paghspa inspired me with confidence. Were I actually hurled into the raging river beneath, he would contrive to do something. Let down his pig-tail perhaps and hook me out.

" Saspul," he said, pointing past rounded shoulders of huge, yellow rocks. Far ahead were green tree-tops. A few more canters, we were once more among green fields.

A queer kind of temple house was adorned with long banners, and three of these poles in petticoats on the roof.

Quite a new scenery rose about us. Gone were glaring slopes. Mountains rose green, purple, snow-crowned, sheltering a valley of trees, grass and gentle slopes. We were back in Switzerland.

Water ran and gurgled, dropping by silver spouts from field to field to little ditches under trees. Two big, white chortans stood among them.

Women in crocodile turquoise head-dresses and darling children gathered round me and stared. A baby-girl stared with all her two round eyes, till I laughed and pointed at her ; then she twirled round, hid her face in her mother's clothes, suddenly self-conscious. They showed me their beautiful chatelaines hung with white shells, tiny

CHORTANS.

But the Jomo ran away !

lamps to light their feet should the lamp of life expire and they wander in the dim, dark land of the dead.

Toddles ate delicious, short grass under the tree, where I tied him. I had to watch to see he did not snatch young barley from a field on a level with his head.

Queerest of all was a little boy with cap, pointed like ears, sheepskin on back, a thin dark brown chest showing in long line beneath dark rags. His grin was delicious. But when the Mem Sahib came she declared he was a girl, one of the budding *jomo*,—a nun!

Ah! little nun, I do not believe it. You are Pan, however disguised. Your eyes told mine something queer, illusive, ultra-human.

. . . . . .

From my Note-book.

On we went to the Saspul bungalow in an orchard of apricot trees. Only one room vacant, too small for the family. I have it. Quiet, shut-off, upstairs, above the noise. Never such contrast as the views from front window and back door.

The front view looks through flickering, sunlit leaves. Do you people of other lands realize how peaceful and happy and merry and alive are little leaves? Try great, empty, desolate deserts. They dance in front of high snow-tops and purple slopes. A delicious wind blows.

The back door looks over dust-roofs to a glare

that strikes and bites. Past gnome chimneys one looks to barren rocks, stark, high, sun-smitten, that hit a sheet of hard blue.

My neighbour has just shown me a vast and splendid array of horns in the yard, his *shikari*, (huntsman,) standing by, looking very proud. Ibex horns, Thibetan antelope, horns of the *Burhel* and *Ovis Amon*, and the skin of a white wolf shot about eight miles from here, near a village, rejoicing in the strange name of Chang Cheng Mo.

Panlike pipes are playing out in the fields over the wall. Can it be Pan himself? Or is it possibly . . . the little nun?—the *jomo*?

In fields to-day we saw clematis for the first time, with an eerie kind of brown flower, looking as if dead before it is alive. And there were three big clumps of yellow marigolds. Once I saw mauve spikes, sticking over a wall, and hustled that wild baby round to see if it were lavender. It was not. The leaf was too leafy.

All along the way one little plant follows faithfully. Little, white and purple mitres alternate with leaves all the way up the stem. Are you of the nettle family, though you do not sting and do grow small thorns? [1]

Soon I shall have seen every flower I know. So far I miss poppy and scabious, but shall probably find them to-morrow.

[1] A salvia.

CHAPTER XVII

June 30th. Saspul to Nyemo, 12 miles.

GOT off stupidly. It happens sometimes.

The new pony was still of the brown tribe, but might be yesterday's great-uncle; though it is hard to judge a pony in the first half-hour, often he warms up and loosens later.

The first two miles and the last two are the long ones on these marches; the middle miles often close up agreeably, like a concertina, but either end drags out. Veteran's jog-trot was impossible. It half killed one to make him canter; but the boy who ran beside him was the very best I had, kept up all the way and tried to make him go.

A bean field was almost in flower, but it was too early for the best smell of all the year. More women grouped in fields, and the Pan-girl, her cap more odd than ever, one peak up, the other down, a long streak of brown chest showing under rags half hidden by sheep-skins. Once more her eyes sent messages.

But of course it was Pan. Neither he nor she. Pan—and sexless.

The Mem Sahib joined me in time to point out

prayer-wheels, eight or ten, the size of little spindles, set in a stand of small wooden frames like window-lintels upon a house-top. Well-dressed women stood watching us, turning the wheels with their hands.

An old man on the road was twirling a hand prayer-wheel busily.

"They generally buy one when they grow old. They think it is well then to be thinking of religion."

My pony-boy saw to it that we left the Mani wall on the right to get the benefit of all the stone prayers. Soon we approached another pass, and wound up a zig-zag.

On the steep slope of the nasty bit of khud Helen rolled herself from end to end of her improvised litter like a snail taking exercise, peering right over the backs of her last men, calling, "Mummie!" cheerfully to the Mem Sahib, mounting the zig-zag, down a straight wall of precipice below. The men, everlastingly chanting their answering song, feeling her crawl, were only amused.

Both parents ordered her to lie down.

But this time we were really among the peaks.

Over the saddle-back we came upon a collection of miniature ranges and peaks, yellow, purple, brown, rising to distant snow-tops, exactly like a raised map of mountains. Before us extended more nobly a rolling pile, rising in the far distance to range beyond range. Among them snow-summits, beneath whose heights was Leh.

Helen was walking, her father thinking that the

best way to loosen superfluous energy. She trudged up to us, her little back as erect as his.

" I want to ride Droma with you ! " she told her mother.

" But poor, old Droma is getting tired and stiff."

" Very well, I shall walk," she observed, on being told to return to her coolies.

Presently she joyfully announced she was to ride Paghspa's pony.

Old days recommenced. No one was to touch her pony.

" Daddy, you can go on to the bungalow. I don't want nobody to mind me ! Auntie, nobody's minding me ! "

" I have this man to look after me ! "

" Then I'm the grown-up lady and you're the little girl."

" Do you know those white mountains over there are above Leh ? " I asked her.

" Of course I know them ! ' Up above the world so high,' " she sang. " They are my very, very, very, very own mountains ! I was borned there. Mummie wasn't and Daddy wasn't and Baby Jo wasn't. They is nobody's but mine. And they are my very, very, very, very own mountains ! "

And so the little girl rose bravely, bobbing up and down, one stirrup longer than the other, over the pass into sight of her own far land.

Presently an oasis of green trees below, a far spot, came gladdeningly to sight.

" This is the hill where everybody gets off."

We went down the winding, broken path.

"Hold up auntie, darling," I begged, as her little strapped shoes slid on the downward slant.

"Don't be 'fraid," she said. "I'll hold you tight. You see, this is my own country, so I can't slip. You'll be quite safe if you hold tight to me!"

At famous pace she trotted me down the hill, certainly faster than any auntie would have gone by herself. We turned the sharp corner . . . another surprise.

Multitudes of spire-like rocks, dark brown to purple, crowned and spiked with tall monasteries and towers, rose grotesque as fairy dream, elfin, other-worldish.

They were real. Not made of paper for pantomime. Not a dream, but living rocks and queer habitations, perched, fastened, apparently hurled upon points. How human feet and hands reached those pinnacles. . . .

Down we went to the happy little river coiling at their feet, picking ponies' steps among boulders where grass grew and water ran.

"Do you realize," the Mem Sahib asked, "that this stony ladder of a water-course path, leading under that funny, little, old Gate of Virtue, is the high road to Central Asia?"

We followed the high road to Central Asia and climbed to the quietest wood of green peace encircling the bungalow.

"The first time we came through here apricots were abloom," the Mem Sahib told me. "I shall

never forget the pink all aglow before those fantastic peaks."

"Spring is very lovely here," she continued. "After ice-bound snow it is wonderful to see green things come once more, and happy little rivulets release and tinkle."

On we went, not stopping at Basgo, passing Choskyid's home; but she seemed strangely callous, in spite of crossing all the long seas to England. She said her people would be out in the fields, and never budged from her small charge. They came to see her at Nyemo.

Before us stretched sand, then again a patch of green trees, where we were to pass the night. It was only 9 a.m., the day's work, I thought, done.

"It's barely a mile off," I said.

"Wait," the Mem Sahib suggested.

The difference between green fields and the heat refraction from stony plain is unbelievable. Heaven or hell in three steps.

Mani walls and chortans spread out into the wilds, and a ridiculous, little wall, on which stones were propped up on each other at intervals, piled into the most ludicrous oddities, looking like little, old men in queer attitudes.

. . . . . .

A mighty battle was fought on this plain.

When the warrior Moghul, King Shah Jehan, was ruling in India, (about 1640 A.D.) messages reached him from the Ladakhi King Delegs, begging his

help to turn the Mongolians from overrunning his land. This Shah Jehan consented to do if King Delegs would become Mussulman.

Historians of that date claim that 600,000 warriors were sent to his assistance. Sir Alexander Cunningham declines to believe it possible that such a number crossed the passes or found sustenance in so barren a land. He records it at 6000. Talking it over with the Dr Sahib, he suggested :

" You might put them down as 600. Possibly there were 60."

However many, or few, a terrible battle raged upon this plain. The fortress of Basgo was uniquely blessed with water-springs. Those great castles always contained grain, deeply stored in vast rocky dungeons.

The Moghul troops crossed the Indus at Kalatze, advanced to Basgo and fought the Mongolians on the plain beyond, routing them completely.

Thus did King Delegs put himself in the power of the Great Moghul, turn traitor to the old warlike tradition of his race and lose large provinces. Had he been faithful to the ways of that mythical King Kesar, he might have revived his song and sent it through the land, rallying all to his banner :—

" You boys, who know how to use the sling, Go to the war !
You girls, who know how to use the spindle, Go to the war !
Whoever can provide for himself, let him do so ;
Whoever cannot, let him be provided for at the Castle of Ling !

Whoever has a horse of his own, let him bring it ;
Whoever has none, let him get one at the Castle of Ling !
March off then towards the land of Hor !
And the King shall march in front of you all ! "[1]

But instead of this spirited hymn, the song of Basgo and Nyemo runs thus :—

" Looking towards the east from the city of Basgo ;
Looking towards the east from the stronghold of Basgo ;
On the field, called Pangkatse, of the King,
On the field, called Pangkatse, of the potentate,
There are three thousand five hundred little beds
And three hundred and sixty little stones to regulate the irrigation of them.
As far as these fields reached the camp of the Mongol, the bad Hor,
As far as that reached the camp of the Mongol, the bad enemy."[1]

It was owing to the internal quarrels of the Red and Yellow Lamas that the Mongolians were let into the land.

. . . . . .

Nyemo.

" One mile indeed ! " I gasped ; " it is five."

" Four," the Mem Sahib clinched the question accurately.

And then we arrived.

Ah ! the joy of these arrivals ! The bliss of green trees, quiet, peace, cool tranquillity.

" Is that the cuckoo ? "

" No, the hoopoe."

[1] From " The History of Western Thibet."

We found a brand-new bungalow, clean, cool breezes in big rooms, and sat down to brunch on the verandah.

" Tee chee chum !
Ham——ko !
Chee chee chi chu
To do hum !
Chee chee chum chu ?
Hamko ! Hamko !
Chin chi chu chee
Chic tee hum ! "

I chanted at the table, mimicking the carrying coolies.

Helen laughed with delight, waved her spoon and wanted more. So did three solemn old coolies, who had carried baby. Seated on the ground they did not laugh. Heads on one side, their faces expressed gravest, deepest interest. Quite a long time after I stopped they did not avert their listening heads.

Their hair is shaved to the edge of their heads, whence it falls in thick bushy pig-tails. Turquoise earrings dangle from their ears; they all wear bracelets, mostly gold and chased. Delightful spoons, long crooked handles set into a sort of cup, are thrust through their sashes.

They were each paid fivepence for carrying baby all those long miles since early morning, and kept saying, *" Joo, joo ! "* in their delight at getting sixpence.

From my Note-book. Nyemo.

A bird on a bough sends forth sweet liquid notes. Impossible to sit here in the cool pleasant wood and believe that broiling desert is on the far side of the wall.

CHAPTER XVIII

July 1st. Nyemo to Spitug,
12 miles. The Last March.

LITTLE Helen had a disturbed, early night, wakened from her first sleep by baby, who was badly frightened by a chicken, not killed for food on account of the present of a lamb from the Wazir. Although hobbled, it managed to get into the bedroom and clucked under the cot.

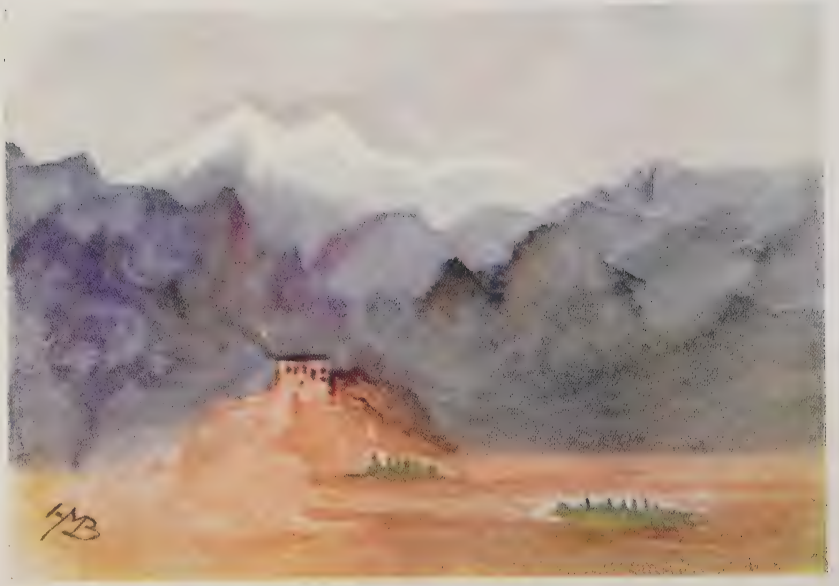
Driven out, that chicken would go back, till the Dr Sahib brought it out in his hands, slapping it soundly.

We were all at half-power, even at breakfast.

An aged camel of a horse, weary joints clicking, was brought round for me to mount. We passed over dry earth, magnificent views before us, scenes opening like a map. Mountains stood about, like people upon plains; we could see through them, past them, even over them.

We climbed our last pass. Huge rocks, looking extraneous to the surface, were hurled about as though prehistoric giants had played games.

Helen was not happy. After the energy of yesterday she again had a pony, but did not like him. Her father gave her a short turn on Droma,



THE SOLITARY MONASTERY OF PHYANG

walking himself. He had double journey to do, so for once was riding. He was to go straight on to Leh and prepare for the party, while I. . . . But that is another story and shall come in its place. The Mem Sahib had a neat little black nag, taken from under packs. We managed a short canter together, though mine lagged badly.

The saddle-back climbed, the valley opened widely, high in the splendid air. Not one, but many landscapes stretched before us. Straight ahead jagged, weird rocks split up fantastic foregrounds to a wide valley, yet another Vale of Kashmir, though far smaller, less fertile, where the Indus split and spread about flat land, pleasantly green, tree-sprinkled. High, white mountains capped blue slopes beyond it.

On the right a succession of sharp mountain tops rose in jagged rock from long slopes of shale.

To the left stood the solitary rock monastery of Pyang, or Phyang, clearly visible across a sandy plain, under a range of its own, blue, purple, snow-crowned.

The cobble surface of vast plain grew intolerably wearisome, though once more God was good to us, the sky sombre, cloud-flecked.

At the stream I regained the others, who were at brunch, but would not stop, though had to dismount, for my saddle had worked on to the horse's neck. Slower and slower had he gone, leaving me far behind the others.

Once more in front I urged him forward, but on

the first slope he stopped dead. Neither whippings of pony-boy, nor draggings of a little fellow with a basket of green grass upon his back would induce him to budge.

The Dr Sahib and little Helen overtook us.

" Is he dying ? " I asked. " Shall I walk ? "

He did his best to urge him on, then offered me Droma and trudged himself for the last mile.

Down a sandy hill, round a rocky corner, we were on the beautiful, flat, green valley, short turf intersected with spreading shallow water.

" That is where I shoot duck," he said. " Partridge too, though to be accurate I should say grouse."

Droma ambled along gently for the sweet mile of short green turf, over some rough ground, where another short shrub again oddly resembled gorse, under green trees, and into a park of a compound, avenues in vistas, a tidy bungalow in the middle. Spitug monastery perched on high rock at little distance.

I sank in a big armchair, more exhausted by the tired beast than by far longer, harder marches.

" I think he is dying," the Mem Sahib announced, as she came in later.

" I hope not ! I should not like to be the last straw on the poor old camel's back."

However he doddled in at last and so did the boy with my bag.

It was my last ride with them. I was to go forward alone to the great Buddhist Festival.

CHAPTER XIX

July 1*st. Spitug to Goolay Wood,* 12 *miles.*

The Mem Sahib lent me Paghspa, a little tent for him and cooking utensils. I was off alone with my belongings into an unknown land, guided by a man of whose language I knew no word.

Had a few, quiet hours, a little meal alone with her, got on a dear, little, dark pony, but it had no bridle.

"They were told not to bring saddle, probably thought that included both."

A tall man who had filled his eyelids with fluff from seeding poplar trees took the halter. At first I thought he had some horrid disease, but grew accustomed to his blinking white cotton at me.

We went into the village under the high cliff, where soared the monastery, to the house of the pony's owner, the Tekkidar, and reached a mud-house in a narrow alley.

A woman screamed from a window. His son, a boy smartly dressed in long purple coat, turned-up hat with gold lace, waited to take me.

No bridle was forthcoming. We went without it, over a big plain plentifully watered with runlets from the Indus, into which the pony either stumbled,

pretty deeply sometimes, while I threw my legs in the air, or else very prettily leapt the running water.

It was odd to have no reins. It felt something like letting go of bicycle handles. At first I clutched the crutch on all special occasions. Soon, however, I found it amusing merely to balance, and balanced better. Of course one had to chance a stumble, but the clever little beast was nimble on his feet.

My guide was careful of all his fine clothes. He ran along the banks and climbed the stones that kept the runnels from too much egress of swift flowing water, throwing the long, braid leader to me. Once he could not save himself, splashed badly in deep water, and came out ruefully.

But that valley! I wonder if it is the sweetest in the whole, wide world?

Sky of tender, blue china stretched overhead. Fine turf edged running water. Eleven thousand feet high, it spread, flat for more miles than one would guess, they looked to me about eleven, from side to side, where mountains rose, regularly as walls, often snow-capped. Of its long length I could make no guess, not even an inaccurate one. On my left the lower, rugged hills jutted out in long projecting points on cliffs upon the valley, culminating in sharp peaks, on which monasteries perched. They must catch the first gleam of morning sun; no doubt the reason of their being on that side.

The air was tender as it was clear, nothing looked crude nor hard, yet one could see every object

distinctly for miles upon miles. Larks trilled gladly in clear heaven. Poplar trees waved in the wind, setting all their little leaves a-dancing. A new flower appeared; a wax-like star of five petals, pale green-ivory in hue.

As evening drew on the larks sang the sweetest of their songs while nestling, that broken lullaby as they drop and sing and are silent, and chirrup fresh joy on nearing the nest.

We crossed the Indus. The boy signed to me to dismount. A narrow plank bridge with good rails, but it was only the first of many. For a long way I walked from one frail plank bridge to another, the Indus divided into half a dozen and more dark brown rushes among rocks and boulders.

On again, this time joining other pilgrims, men, women, children, all off to Haemis. Never were pilgrims more blithe and gay. Dressed in their best, on foot or mounted, away they all went as if to a fair.

Finally some coolies joined us. I could not shake free from them. They talked to my boy. They laughed and repeated my broken words. They never meant to be rude. Probably I was the first of my species they had seen; but I grew weary, weary, and that Goolay Bagh never came.

It was always the next bunch of trees, and the next and next. I was powerless to hasten the pony with a poor, little switch it did not mind and no bridle. Nor did I know the way if I abandoned the boy, who had long ceased to hasten. . . .

At long last, but long, long last . . . I left at four; they said it was eight miles, but it was just on eight o'clock when I turned between stone walls on to ground covered with scrub and a few poor trees.

No sight could be so good to me as Paghspa before my tent.

In the gloaming a figure in turban came to meet me, not Paghspa.

"Paghspa!" I cried. "Paghspa!"

And the mocking coolie repeated:—"Paghspa!"

The turbaned one turned round, led me onwards to a poor little open shed, where stood Paghspa, a pony, several men, and no tent.

"Tent?" I cried, my hands to heaven, sloping down over my tired head.

Paghspa gravely led me through darkening trees to a bare space. He spread a small carpet and waved me to it. I sank upon it.

"Where is my tent?"

He and the following men waved to the way we had come. They had started at three o'clock, five hours to do eight miles! But not a vestige of them had I seen upon the road. Sun had set. Night was darkening. A small moon began faintly to shine.

Was it planned?

Paghspa . . . but could I even trust him? They had me here alone, all my baggage in their hands. . . .

And then the gentle, little wife of the turbaned

man, in her long claret-coloured robe, smiled a courteous, welcoming smile. God bless her for that smile. I gave her a few annas next morning. She received the gift as if from heaven.

They took me to see the best they could offer me, through dilapidated buildings to a dirty courtyard, smelling of dung, and showed me a verandah. I had on a cotton riding-habit and a woollen sweater. Poor comfort for a cold night!

I went back to the tree and the carpet. It was now black dark. My one hope was the bridleless pony. I could wrestle through till dawn, then ride back the far more than eight miles to Spitug.

Paghspa offered me milk from the soldier's canteen on his shoulder. I took it and a nip of brandy from my bag, felt better.

After all, a night is only a night.

Shouting began at the end of the wood. Paghspa ran, I followed.

Up the broken road came three dawdling pack-ponies.

Ten minutes later I lay in bed under my tent. Paghspa brought me a cup of cocoa and the box of bread and biscuits. My carefully planned little supper was never cooked.

I blessed the Mem Sahib who had sent a lamp. Idly had I vaunted it would not be wanted.

A tinkling bell sounded in the wood. After my late scare it was comforting to think a grand Ladakhi lady, turquoise-studded, sheep-skin cloak of embroidered silk, was also camping there, for

she alone of all the pilgrims had a bell upon her horse.

. . . . . .

July 2nd. Goolay Bagh to Haemis, 12 *miles.*

It was still pitch dark when Paghspa prowled around. Four o'clock. Just as well to be off.

I ordered up pony-men to pack tent, take away my baggage, sat down on a straw mat on the bare place left and ate breakfast. Coffee, eggs and a delicious bowl of sour milk.

A quarter to five, ready to start, I went over to the ponies.

Not one was ladened. The men had thrown baggage about, while Paghspa had unpacked every single thing he possessed, stores, cooking-pots, crockery, and I with not a word to hasten them! We got off at twenty minutes to six, sun already up; but I would not stir without him.

He insisted on a bridle. A wonderful arrangement of embossed leather and gilt ornaments was found, with short, round, yellow rein that barely clasped the pony's neck.

Paghspa's pony was followed by a tiny foal, cluttering at its mother's heels. It was this wee thing that had the bell at its neck. No other pilgrim was in the wood.

Villages were studded with pilgrims. We crossed much water and lost the way several times. Once we were on the wrong side of the Indus, or one of its branches. Paghspa bravely drove his pony through

the swift-running water, which almost closed over the saddle, holding his legs tilted high before him. I hesitated on the brink.

A labourer ran from his field, pointed to a place lower down. I retreated there. He tucked his long clothes up to his thighs, waded in and fetched me across. I too tilted up my legs. Paghspa on his pony came valiantly to meet me.

I was over and quite dry.

The boy in his fine clothes was left running and running along the far bank like a distracted chick. About a mile farther on he found a place to cross.

The scenery changed.

The fair valley was left. Barren stones, sand stretched and stretched. We could not make my pony canter. I was in doubt whether he had food since leaving Spitug, but could only say :—

"Pony" in Thibetan, "Dinner" in Urdu, and whether Paghspa understood I shall never know. He was always cheerfully reassuring.

Pilgrims multiplied.

Once three women ahead looked like a great gleaming crocodile or snake of clotted turquoise.

The leader sat on saddle-bags on a pony, her *paragh* high against the sky. Where it ended began the *paragh* of a woman on a donkey, while a third, trotting on her own feet, just caught the tail of that with the top of her own.

Woman and the snake! Strangely enough it symbolises the snake.

We mounted steadily, facing directly the mountain wall. These plains are maddening. They look no distance, but every little rise brings one in sight of more. They stretch like elastic.

I sent Paghspa ahead, hoping my flagging pony would follow closely; but the wee foal was also tired, and, like little Helen, would allow no one between itself and its mother, with jealous instinct that was both laughable and touching, particularly when the pretty, little creature lifted baby-heels in an ineffectual kick.

I hoped a chortan marked a rocky shoulder, round which we might find the ravine, but the nearer we came the more solid looked the mountain wall.

Two resplendent figures, straight from mediæval ages, appeared on the path above, red-robed, with huge gleaming pagoda-like yellow hats on their heads, flat brims with queer mounting crowns, glittering like gold. Horses richly caparisoned in scarlet and brass trappings, they ambled over the plain.

Paghspa short-cutted across their path, shouting to them as if they were merely human.

They waved to the chortan. The gorge was there.

Sun was so tiresome; even to turn in another direction and have it smite in fresh place was relief.

It was joy to enter the ravine, trees ahead, promising shade. We tailed on to other pilgrims up a narrow, climbing street. Rock dwellings, queer piled houses rose above our heads. At last the

A LAMA.

monasteries, long and low for monasteries in this land, brightly painted, decked with flags, festoons and carpets appeared above us. Little booths, mere canvas strips thrown over sticks, were stuck in corners along the rocky way. Rosaries were for sale and piles of hats that would create a new mode in Paris.

We came to a broken, open space beneath monastery walls. The earth fell sharply to a gorge, where trickled a limpid stream.

A Lama joined us.

"Sahib and Mem Sahib Bagh?" I managed to question.

He led the way across the stream, up the opposite steep bank, a path under trees, to a little spot of heavenly sweetness.

. . . . . .

From my Note-book.
Haemis, July 2nd.

A tiny rill between cushioned green banks. Trees overhead, bushes of wild roses, big grey boulders. I threw a sack off Paghspa's horse against a rock, lay upon it under boughs, and slept from 9.30 till 11.30, when pack-ponies arrived and tent went up.

I pointed out a delectable spot for my tent, wrote a letter on my knees, looked up. They were putting the back to the view and the rill, the door to a sun-scorched rock. Quite amiably they turned the tent round. Returned to my letter. They were pinning down tent and fly together to pegs. No shelter for

sun or rain. Equally amiably they unfastened it all, set it up properly.

Little flowers grew on the wee banks, the brightest blue I ever saw, buttercups, too, on low stems, the double-lipped flower that seemed cut out of violet petals were all over the rocks. On the floor of my tent, up the hill and down the hill, grew the sweetest-smelling, pale grey herb.

Lunch consisted of half the chicken that disturbed the children. Paghspa declared he killed it last night at Goolay Bagh, where virulent gesticulations of throat-cutting went on between us, but it was tough as if, which is probable, it was killed that hour.

As usual he flavoured the gravy deliciously. I lunched off half a cupful, brown bread, excellent butter, potatoes and strawberry jam at a little table, spread with clean cloth and flowers under the willows and rose-bushes.

An Englishwoman arrived and camped above.

When we wanted to cross to the village and monastery we found we were prisoners.

Midday sun had melted the snows. The streamlet in the gorge was a torrent. Not even ponies could ford it. Our rill ran furiously, no longer clear but dull murky brown.

CHAPTER XX

July 3rd. Haemis. The Festival.

THE Wazir's Mounshi came over next morning. He escorted me to the monastery, leading through dark walls, narrow passages, up awkward stairs, to arrive at last at a gallery overlooking the festive courtyard where the play was to take place.

From my Note-book.

But how describe this courtyard and all the colour of it? The low, two-storied monastery is a flicker with moving flags, rags, strips of bright cottons, curtains and carpets. We sit on a shaded gallery, the Wazir, his children and attendants about us. On all the roofs, crushed into every corner of the courtyard, dozens of women and children are squatting. Rosy-brown skins thrown into relief by gleaming blue turquoise crocodile tails, huge fur flaps extend like wings beneath them. Men are mostly on roof-tops. Eager faces, roses tucked in their stylish hats, watch every movement.

Red-garbed priests gather on the Temple steps in the left-hand corner among coloured pillars and flags.

An immense banner of Gautama, the Buddha, hangs down the wall. Women prostrate themselves before it, laying the front of their turquoise *paraghs* right into the dust; silky sheep-skins, fur inwards, hang gracefully off their shoulders as cloaks.

Acolytes come down with high vases, offer them on the shelf below the Buddha. Flour and butter mixed, formed into shapes, coloured red, dead flowers stuck into them, are laid there too.

A priest descends the steps, carrying a bush of dead leaves and a covered cup. Bagpipes in the Temple send forth odd, thrilly sounds. Ecclesiastics emerge, swinging heavy silver censers, closely followed by Lamas in gigantic hats, black, flat brims, but immense, off which float banners, streamers and veils, odd cabalistic devices above them. They wear old Chinese vestments, long cloaks, straight as table-cloths, silk and satin skirts, long chased silver and ebony pipes in their hands. Each is a spot of vivid colour, they are heralded by a huge burst of uncouth music. Two red-garbed men are blowing into immensely long old chased trumpets, eight or ten feet long, the mouths rest on the ground. They too wear enormous hats and breathe forth the most dramatic music ever heard. Stirring deep growling notes swell, but swell, and die away. Sudden, high, shrill and movingly repeated. Then silence, growls, grumbles. All extraordinarily exciting, suggestive.

The mandarin-like, high-hatted ones jump three

times on one foot, swing round on it with other leg widely extended, drop on the other foot, jump three times, hitch, swing round on it, faster and faster, round and round the two high poles, whence swing flags and holy yaks' tails.

A humming, buzzing sound like the drone of a water-wheel succeeds the huge pipes. Then distant tom-tomming.

Now we hear priests intoning prayers exactly as in a Roman Catholic Church under the gallery beneath us. Cymbals clash. Expectancy is worked up to the last pitch. Wang, wang, wang goes some queer instrument against the clatter of cymbals.

"Their dance is a prayer," the Mounshi lent forward in his chair to tell me. "A priest recites: he may say, 'Aum,' the one dancing takes his hand and his leg up on that same tone. On that tone of prayer they set the gesture of the dance. It is all one movement or emotion. One Lama repeats it, the other moves it."

More people crowd the courtyard. Old men now group to the edges of the circle, ever widening into the dust. Clustered masses of colour are all round the courtyard, finishing with the clump of red, claret, purple of Lamas on the Temple steps.

So far no masks have appeared except the huge, enormous, yellow, grinning masks of two, armed with whips, under immense Khaki Tam-o'-shanters. Can they be devils? They dance and whirl like Highlanders.

" What do you call them ? " the Mounshi asked. " Jokers or orderlies ? "

One, saluting beneath us, looks uncommonly like a Jock, with the addition of an immensely long and thick pig-tail.

Two by two the dancers retreat up the Temple stairs.

The intoning, this time without music, is taken up again, more earnestly, on longer, deeper notes.

The sweet-faced grinning Jocks are running about the crowd, bending to babies, gesticulating, making women laugh.

Happy-faced women cross the courtyard, stooping to prostrate themselves, babies clinging to their hips.

" It is only Lamas who do the dancing," a Mohammedan on my left, an earnest man in dark beard and blue turban, leans forward to tell me.

Bewildered by the conviction (for which I was unprepared, everyone spoke of " Devil-Dancing," as though some fanatical lusts were wildly moved), that deep mystical if not exactly religious meaning, some allegory or parable lies behind all these fantastical scenes, I eagerly question my neighbours. Not a Buddhist is in the balcony. Hindus, or rather Brahmins, the Mohammedan and a Christian.

Some sort of vague understanding on general lines emanate from the first two. They try to meet my questions in the courteous way to which India has accustomed me. They say they do not know much. Now a bell rings sharply. Big drums, cymbals, pipes clash.

Three notes of high introduction. Priests intone against solitary beats of heavy drums, held in the air on long painted carved staves.

The jokers look sharply round over their shoulders as if seeing something. The expression on their painted faces is ludicrously jocular. Enormous pig-tails, eked out by black wool, hang down their backs. They twirl round. Yellow skirts fly out like kilts.

The caps and head-dresses of the watching crowd alone would make a fairy festival.

More priests waving censers arrive.

Here they come! Down the Temple steps enormous black hats, like umbrellas, rise into paper effigies, every colour under the sun streaming from them in ribbons and on the embroidery of their rich garments. They move solemnly, dancing in circle, stand on one toe, shaking the other, all together, priests intoning, deep drums vibrating, beating the rhythm. Flags, blue and white, are shaken, they turn and turn, extend hands and flags together, round and round the great yak's tail pole.[1]

Acolytes run to each with dried grass from before the Buddha banner.

The joker runs round, mimicking them, like a clown in a circus.

A Lama stands in the centre with a vase of peacock flowers, a smoking pan at his feet.

[1] Have learnt since these great hatted ones are the astrologers who predict the future by horology.

Scent of incense rises, swung out of sight beneath the gallery at our feet.

Twirling one-footing begins again, the dried grass is waved.

Music loudens.

They jump three times quickly on each foot after the swift whirl. Quick! Quick! Quick! They go. Never such fantasy of twisting colour could be seen.

Two big-hatted pipers call them back to the Temple steps, two by two they go, whirl to the steps, the jokers still joking. They will play with anything. One joker has a prayer-wheel now, the other tries to get it from him. Now one twists his pig-tail over his Tam-o'-shanter, shivers a dance to the exciting music.

Thump! Thump! Thump! The last dancers withdraw. Intoning has ceased.

A turban looks out of place. The joker beats its owner with his pig-tail.

Clash! Clash!

A bright yellow head-dress [1] like a huge Roman helmet appears among the claret priests on the Temple steps.

Silence, but for the patter of the joker's bare feet.

Deep intoning rises again, very beautiful, rich voices among them, hitting on weird notes.

Mandarins descend the steps in chased brass masks with long brass noses, open to the cheeks and eyes. They rattle small green rattles and ring

[1] A sort of Master of the Ceremonies.

bells, an odd, sudden sound, again creating expectancy, doing it only on the step. Intoning penetrates through intervening silence. This is very solemn. Their garments are Chinese and gorgeously rich. They wear dome hats. Now the movement increases. A high but dignified step. Slow again, the rattling much longer, intoning yet deeper. Obeisances are made with lingering toe movements. All is simultaneous. They draw in closer. Every rattle has its significance and sounds different. This must rank higher than the preceding circle and is of shorter duration.

The twos already retire. Pause, filled only by the hum of the happy crowd, the mad movements of the jokers.

A long and narrow carpet is now spread under the tall poles.

They come, the real affair of the day! Loud clashing music, enormous masks (but it is too bewildering to get on paper) crowd around an immense Buddha with white-faced mask under a canopy umbrella. Huge devil masks intermingle, while other dancers descend, their own faces exposed under great head-dresses, in yellow silk aprons, all dressed alike. These seem to be a sort of chorus or choir to the real dramatis personæ, the huge masked ones, who withdraw (the greater among them) and sit in a solemn row, faces grinning, leering, white, red, green, under the right-hand balcony. The chorus seats itself along the strip of carpet. The perfume of incense is delicious. It

might be made of the grey herb that scents the hillsides.

Five or six now with great grotesque masks are making buffoonery in the centre, yet all in time and rhythm to intoning and music. One has a mouth that opens and shuts ; a great red eye that falls in and out.

Shrill whistles and four leaping imps arrive, huge mask faces, high clown hats, flags twisting up little masts above them. Twirling, leaping. The curious excitement of it all increases. Ha, ha ! the whistles !

One silly face has blue hair and blue beard. They gambol and hit each other, delighted roars rise from the crowd, while solemn intoning continues.

The expression of the masks are droll and sly, full of intellect. They add meaning and seem to fit every gesture. A little brown child in the crowd with red peaked cap regards all quite gravely.

The chorus on the long mat sit immobile in their gorgeous clothes. Three mounting black balls, gold-spiked, adorn their hats, the brim turned up high like mitres in embroidered brick colour. Intoning is deep and sad. A drum booms at intervals.

Four men now descend the steps, thin but big hand-drums on staves are beautifully mounted with myriad colours. Their hats are like lamp-shades. They hit the drum with a ball on top of a twisted brass wire.

Intoning stops.

FOUR LEAPING IMPS ARRIVE.

Faint soft music of the quaintest, intoning whistling is made by these newcomers. One has his finger on his mouth to assist. They kneel, get up, whistle, drum to the huge masked ones, massed together beneath the state umbrella.

If only one could know the signification of each apparent oddity ! Through it all a certain solemnity is there. And the imperturbable, huge, painted faces still look intelligent and dwarf an ordinary face, so that it looks insignificant beside them.

One huge mask is like a Pekinese spaniel in blue, gold and red, mouth grins, tongue lolls. Another is a red elephant's trunk upturned, carrot pig-tail hanging. The practice must be extraordinary to bring all movement to such simultaneous perfection.

The four move away slowly, bowing to their own music to the big masks. The centre one under the umbrella is represented by a learned Lama.

Now from among the seated group of masks a beautiful blue one rises. Blue of his mask is repeated on his shoulders and through his exquisitely embroidered mandarin coat. He slowly gyrates, mask smiling, bells in his hand which he does not ring. Intoning grows very solemn. He flags out his skirts and finally returns, somewhat like a little girl, to his place.

Another of the masked ones gets up, kicks his feet unexpectedly, yet listening intently to the intoning, whence he takes his cue.

Now another is up, holding a huge green rattle, shaped like an hour-glass, above his head. He

looks like an old bed-woman in flowered dressing-gown, and executes capering movements.

Up gets another, red this time. His smaller black rattle strikes a higher significant note like an answer. And yet the next stands tottling on his toes. He has a small scimitar. Now he is off on a swaying, jerking movement, leaping with both arms in the air.

Nothing is haphazard, unpremeditated. Every movement has been made through long ages at exactly the same note.

They are whirling, twirling, intermingling, chasing, dancing. The Mohammedan beside me says some are attacking, some are protecting the Buddha and his disciples. Death's heads are perched on some of the foreheads. Wild, fierce, awesome music rattles, screams, groans, rises, falls. Drums beat. Huge pipes wail.

The umbrella goes slowly up the stairs, a mass of colour and masks beneath it.

The big pipers at the head of the stairs send forth awe-inspiring blasts.

The weirdest, wildest sight in the world is calming to a close.

We look down on the emptying courtyard, the watching faces, the twisting, blue crocodile head-dresses, exhausted by the display, the excitement, the emotion of it all.

An old woman in tattered rags crosses the dust space, prostrates herself before the banner.

"The women are emotional," the Mounshi says

to me as we move. "They will kiss the ground. The males do not mind so much."

. . . . . .

Written later.

Among a confused blaze of impressions one thought arose, that this intermingling of religion, dance, story, music, emotion is the basic element, the first expression of human need for things, not far apart as we generally consider them, but springing from one source ;—man's necessity of expression for what is hidden within him, his true inwardness, his often unutterable self.

So that days later, at Leh, when Harry Lauder's cheery tones rang out on the gramophone and little Helen danced on the floor, chanting the chorus, something within me called him, not music-hall artiste, but high priest of Humanity.

CHAPTER XXI

July 3rd. The Monastery.

We went up the high-stepped stairs, several dilapidated flights from one bare, earthen-floored place to another, until we reached a collection of rooms, small, full of images of Buddha, low tables, mats, passing from one room to another over a high stone step, cracking solar topees against low doors, until we came into the presence of the Skushogh, the Abbot, the head Lama of all.

He was simply dressed in claret-coloured gown, clean-shaven, wore spectacles and very short hair. A coral rosary was twisted about his left wrist.

The Wazir's Mounshi kindly translated questions into Urdu to a Lama squatting on the ground, who translated into Thibetan.

The monastery, he told us, is three hundred years old ; the plays were brought to them with costumes and masks from Lhasa two hundred years ago. Every movement is taught and is full of significance.

A photograph of Lhasa was handed round. The monastery stood tall and bare, several stories high, in the midst of a city in the centre of a vast plain and wall of mountains.

He had three hundred men in all within this

monastery, students, disciples, and priests, also fifty nuns.

All were celibates. Certain of them visit villages to teach and preach.

He told us he was the fifth re-incarnation of the Abbot of that monastery. Asked if he expected to go higher, he replied in his next life he would be Skushogh of the Lhasa Monastery. Asked if he would go yet higher and free himself from earth-existence, an affirmation was given, but no remark.

I longed to ask how he knew himself to be the former Abbot re-incarnated, but he showed lack of interest. Neither Mounshi nor I could frame the question. I asked the meaning of the yaks' tails. He replied they were among the precious things of God.

Presenting money offerings we descended the steep, dark stairs and were shown into rooms, libraries or small temples, where manuscripts lay on shelves.

There were many antique images of the Buddha. One, quite small, was set in a huge, chased lump of silver and gold. Great was my surprise to see a large image or god with eleven heads, three above three then two.

In one of these apartments five figures, made of some sort of composite wax mixture, sat in a row, life-size and very life-like. These were the former abbots or incarnations of the Skushogh we had just visited. We understood he was the fifth; but here were five. Doubtless he was the sixth. He

seemed to have been extremely good-looking in some of the former incarnations.

There was no smell of any kind, not even of incense. Passages were low, dirty, rough as if to poor stables and were generally dark.

. . . . . .

Written later.

The Skushogh had spent thirteen and a half years in meditation in a mountain cave.

The method of discovering the new re-incarnation of a deceased Skushogh is as follows :—

The state horologist, assisted by others, is called upon to discover by certain astronomical signs the baby, born about nine months to two years later, likely to be invested with his soul.

He sends Lamas to houses, often of the peasants, predicting certain signs and conditions which they verify. Sometimes three or four children are thus picked out, and there follows the test of recognition. While still very young, scarcely able to stand, rosaries, bells and other objects are laid before them, among them those used by the late Skushogh.

The child reaches to one or another. If he chooses some relic of the late Skushogh he is supposed to have recognized his own.

Lastly, if several children still remain, a holy mass is performed ; their names are written on slips of paper, put in a vase. One is drawn by a high Lama to intoning, incense, music and prayer. Finally, the last word is pronounced by the Dalai

Lama of Lhasa ; the chosen boy is divinely elected to be the Skushogh and the re-incarnation of former abbots.

. . . . . .

July 4th. Still at Haemis.

The morning was sweet in the delectable spot where my tent was pitched. Afternoon sun beat badly there. Great relief when the sun dropped, several hours before setting, behind the high wall above the monastery of the gorge.

At actual sunset it was wonderful to climb the shoulder and look at the plain below, the mountains across it.

The deep shade of our gorge framed like a picture a glow of bright sunlight, sharpening peaks of the sunlit range across the wide valley.

Mighty slopes overreached each other, rose to snowy summits against crystalline sky.

As sunset deepened, a wine-like radiance spread, purple-coloured as the raiment of the Lamas. The mountain range seemed steeped in claret, deepening in shadow, softening on clear summits. Even after sun had sunk, tints lingered so saturated by sunlight they could not lose the warmth. I loitered, expecting a death-like pallor that never came. Wind blew chill. Wanting to be in bed by nightfall, I turned among the stones into the darkened gorge, stooping for a last morsel of sweet-smelling, pale, grey herb.

Weird, wakeful night! Notes of horn heaved

and boomed on silent air. Moon was up, bright and silvery. Waving tree-tops in its rays seemed to take on odd shapes, to wear gigantic masks, to bend and sway to some unheeded intonation, fraught with unheard significance to every living creature, making leaves dance, little birds sing. . . .

Bewildered, in the dark as to the meaning, the relation, the revelation between intonation, emotion, the inner significance of thousand grinning masks, the whole world seemed spinning, whirling, working to some equally hidden direction of energy, guiding, instructing all. Only we are too mazed, too far outside to hear our own inner instruction.

CHAPTER XXII

Deities and Demons. Haemis.

It was aggravating to waken to yet another day of this mythical, allegorical presentation and know oneself hopelessly in the dark, unable to untangle the tale.

Yet had I known the skeleton of material from which these fables were drawn, I doubt if I would have been able to unravel the thread.

Sakyi Muni or Gautama, the Buddha, was born in India in 560 B.C. The philosophy of the great reformer did not reach Thibet for over a thousand years. About 629 A.D. Buddhism was accepted under King Shrong Tsan Sgampa. Even in India Buddhism had lapsed into many of the uses of the religions from which it had sprung, but whose polytheism it originally totally rejected. Once more gods and goddesses were reinstated; while in Thibet, though the higher philosophy was accepted by leading minds, the superstitions of Bon Chos and Shamanism were in addition amalgamated with the Buddhism then brought to them.

It is to put the myriad in a nutshell; but I attempt to throw down on paper, the personages,

deities and demons preserved for reverence and worship in Little Thibet at this hour.

I. The five great Buddha of whom Gautama was the fourth. The expected Messiah or *Maitreyah*, the fifth, is yet to appear.

It is confusing to hear, as one does, that the Dalai Lama of Lhasa is supposed to be the re-incarnation of the Buddha. Gautama announced himself freed from the wheel of life or earthly existence on the great Day of Enlightenment, as he sat beneath the pipal tree at Bodh Gaya.

The truth is, that other incarnations have been found, which brings us to :—

II. The Bodhisats. These are "the active reflexes from the relatively impassive celestial Buddhas." [1]

Of these the foremost are *Manjusri*, the sweet-voiced wisdom. *Vajrapani*, the Wielder of Thunderbolt (Indra or Jupiter,) a fiend-type, either black or blue. *Avalokita*, the All-good, of supernatural attributes, depicted by eleven heads and four hands. He it is who finds himself re-incarnated in the Dalai Lama of Lhasa.

Several others are also to be worshipped, though not so powerful.

III. Next follow their Consorts. *Tara*, Mercy; *Marci*, the Resplendent, and many others.

IV. Tutelary gods. Of these are the Demon Kings, Defenders of the Faith, the fierce Tam-din among them. Also the great She-Devil, "Queen of the Warring Weapons," who loosens disease.

[1] Colonel Waddell on "Lamaism."

" She is clad in human skins and is eating human brains and bones from a skull." [1] She has several attendant queens, riding upon different animals. She is publicly worshipped for seven days by Lamas of certain sects, especially at the end of the twelfth month in connection with the prevention of disease for the coming year. " There is offered to her the fat of a black goat, blood, wine, dough, butter, in a bowl made from a human skull." [1]

V. Lord-Demons, seventy-five in number, among them, " the Lord of foreknowledge."

VI. *Dakkins* or Furies. These are chiefly the Consorts of the Lord-Demons.

VII. Godlings and Angels, including the God of Wealth, the Judge of the Dead, and so on.

VIII. Country gods. Of these there are eight different kinds, including King Fiends and Mother She-Devils, " the disease mistress," the twelve furies.

IX. Local gods and genii, occupying soil, rocks, springs.

X. The House-god, who takes up different positions about the house in different months and moves into the kitchen in winter. Tea and beer are offered to him. There is something highly human about him.

XI. Personal gods or familiars. Spirits that accompany men like guardian angels.

There yet follow saints, disciples, apostles and missionaries, sanctified and reverenced. Wizard-

[1] Colonel Waddell on " Lamaism."

priests. One of these, Padma-Sambhava, is worshipped in eight differing forms.[1]

Again, in the mystic play, Bon Chos gods have survived to take part, notably the Red Tiger Devil and many others.

. . . . . .

July 4th. From my Note-book.

But to-day is a family party ! Gaiety, merriment rules everywhere. Men and women move lightly, running across empty space, while little children grow suddenly bold, dash out to the joker and flee back again to their mothers' arms.

The portrait of a former incarnation of the Abbot hangs out as the banner of the day, replacing the Buddha. He has a squint, a very holy sign I am told, slightly marring an otherwise benevolent expression. Red roses dot the women's blue *paraghs*, stand out like rosettes from the men's stylish hats.

. . . . . .

The pause was long. The Abbot was receiving gifts within the Temple. Slightly nervous as to my reception I nevertheless climbed the steps and penetrated into thick, dark atmosphere, laden with shadow and colour. Great banners fell overhead. Lamas with long pipes or intoning from sacred books crouched on long cushions, extended between carved arms in lines across the floor.

Faces blown out, they could not smile ; but kindly removed their pipes to do so, welcoming me.

[1] See Colonel Waddell on "Lamaism."

THE JOKERS CAME DOWN THE STEPS.

Prostration and offerings, chiefly from women, went on before the altars. I could not see the Skushogh, probably within some smaller space. Masks lay on the floor, garments in huge heaps. Dancers raced to and fro, some lifting their masks to show small faces beneath. It was like the wings of some great theatre. I moved around. All had a smile for me. Courtesy was complete.

Out again in the yard. Figures still prostrated themselves before the banner. The joker too laid himself flat, arms and legs extended. He makes fun of everything. Bubbly laughter burst on all sides.

A very ragged man was dancing with the other joker.

A woman, though in rags, raised her arms most gracefully above her head, gazed at the banner, fell on her knees, laid her head in the dust, all with swaying rhythm, finally laid her head with devotion against the altar cloth.

The women dressed alike, rich and poor, only the rich ones more richly.

It was most tiresome not being able to talk to them. I wondered if the women had many husbands. Here, where the land is poor, literally only a certain number of people can hope or expect to be supported, so brothers share a wife. Yet women are not scarce here as in the wilds of farther Thibet. Still it would have been an awkward question to put suddenly. Certainly they were happy. Smiles do not flit so swiftly to

the faces of the overdriven. They share the life of the men, working in the fields, much like European peasants. Dear, little, rosy-cheeked dark children looked healthy. Everyone was kind to them. I never saw even an angry look turned upon a child.

The jokers were pursuing the men and snatching their hats. A small coin purchased it back. If not forthcoming they withdrew to a corner, searched it for needles and pricked them on to their own breasts, treating the hat to coarse gestures, if none were found. A few figures danced at long intervals, but the human interest of the crowd alone filled long hours of the morning.

Returning in the early afternoon, shouts, sudden spurts of laughter and dense crowds warned me that some excitement was afoot.

Coming up the narrow alley I just had time to fling myself flat against the wall when a pony nearly threw me over. Two ponies and a big dog, sides streaming with red paint, mane and tails streaming, nostrils dilated, terrified at the roaring crowd, were driven across the courtyard, out into the streets, round again, through once more, I do not know how many times. Herds of men, arms upheld, sticks, stones, drove the frantic creatures.

They were the scapegoats. I had missed the short ceremony when they were streaked with paint, resembling blood, and set forth on their wild chase to bear away the sins of the people.

Released, no toil will ever again be put upon them. In this land of hard work, of wrestling life from an

unwilling soil, they will wander on upland pastures free.

Seated beside the Wazir in the balcony, we watched the jokers with their friendly whips mass the crowd for the afternoon spectacle. "No wrong, no trouble, no police!" he said to me. "In India such a crowd would want a lot of police."

"They seem a gentle-minded folk."

"No evil intentions whatever, always kind and simple. Nothing but merriment."

One thousand years ago they must have been exactly the same, living their own lives, twirling everlastingly their spindles to make their own good, well-cut clothes, eating their own barley, taming their own ponies, never seeing a vehicular wheel. Just as now, all burdens went only upon backs. Gay, gentle, courteous, laughter-loving people.

The afternoon performance lent itself to interpretation; for it seemed to consist of blessing and protecting from evil spell the simple necessities of earthly life.

Four Chinese oddities danced, ringing silver bells. Four silver cups were given them, filled with water from a beautiful bronze ewer by a priest to deep intoning. Dancing, they flung the water from the cups, which were replenished with grain. As they whirled, coats, sleeves, skirts and danglers seemed to fill every corner of the court with sunshine and colour. A gay and merry bull came with big blue horns, white boots and flying skirts, scimitar in one

hand, long black hair in the other, a death's-head painted on his chest. He is "the Holy King of Religion," only a monk of the purest morals may play this part.

Censers, silver pipes led out the Bull, followed by huge masks, all with death's-heads painted on their breasts, death's-heads round their painted heads. All wore boat-like, white felt shoes. Even the death's-heads grinned and were merry.

A picture or rather a symbol was drawn in coloured chalk beneath the yak-tail pole. Upon it a cake was laid. They gyrated and turned, directing loose chains, weapons, mock human entrails, bells, whatever they held towards it. Intoning continued and may possibly have been culled from, or at least resembled, this treasure of ;—

"The Expelling oblation of the hideous Fierce Ones."[1]

"Hum! Through the blessing of the blood-drinking Fierce One let the injuring demons and evil spirits be kept at bay. I pierce their hands with this hook. I bind their hands with this snare of rope. I bind their body with this powerful chain. I keep them down with this tinkling bell. Now, O blood-drinking Angry One, take your sublime seat upon them. Vajor-Agu-cha-dse! Vajora-pasha-hum!" . . .

"Hum! O ye hosts of gods of the Magic Circle! Open your mouths as wide as the earth and sky, clench your fangs like rocky mountains, and prepare to eat up the entire bones, blood, and the entrails of all the injuring evil spirits. Ma-ha-mam-sa-la Kha hi!"

At last the cake was cut, distributed to the huge-faced ones. Four white imps, clothed tightly to

[1] "Lamaism." Colonel Waddell.

the figure, even to the toes, in snowy white, masked with death's-heads, bells about their waists, effaced the picture with whirls and twirls. Their mouths clacked and looked like laughter while they tossed fools' baubles of skulls. Even the King of Terrors may be a merry vagabond! After the twirl and whirl and twist and non-comprehensibility of gyrating human life, the End may still crown all with something natural as mirth.

. . . . . .

The merry crowd still waited. Women leant forward on seated haunches to peer, pulling the children down beside them.

The actual play was over, ended without the appearance of the Skushogh in gorgeous robes, a plaited lattice-work of human bones overlacing them, as friends of mine have seen.

But yet another pretty farce was enacted.

A feeble, old man with brown face-mask, supported by a pole and held up by five darling imps, children in huge, yellow masks, little brown bodies showing above yellow skirts, tottered down the Temple steps. They put him on a stool in the centre of the court, rubbed his head, sprang around, playfully hitting each other. An affable, old nurse-person with censer and wand and silly grin on a paper face wandered among them.

The old man held out cake and sweets to the imps who, with graceful antics and spontaneous leaps, sprang forward to snatch them. Away went

the sweet, out came a whip. Roars of laughter rose from the crowd as they caught a stripe, or better still, snatched the candy and escaped the whip.

Dark, tousled-headed babies trotted into the circle to play too, and ran back affrighted to their mothers to be gathered and clutched warmly to laughing breasts.

Suddenly the five little ones ceased the game, danced a set dance, merrily, swiftly around the great pole to the clink of cymbals. They tapped each other lightly. Closing round the old man, reaching only to his elbows, they hauled and pushed him up the Temple steps.

The courtyard lay in deep shade. People prostrated themselves flat before the banner. One woman taught her little child the way to prostrate. The crowd intermingled and broke away.

"It is all over," the Wazir Sahib said, pulling himself up from his chair.

CHAPTER XXIII

June 5th. Haemis to Leh.

THE crack of splitting wood woke me at 4 a.m. It was still pitch dark.

"Miss Sahib!" Paghspa whispered at my tent door in the deeply mysterious tone necessary to the hour.

The struggle began.

Up in the dim dawn, no ponies were there.

"*Sta!* Paghspa, *sta!*" I cried in heart-breaking accents.

All Haemis, including the Abbot, must have heard the rock-resounding cries wherewith Paghspa summoned the delinquents.

They came. They stood stolidly about, ponies and pony-men.

I seized the men's long sleeves and dragged them to my tent, from peg to peg, to demolish it, saying:—

"*Juldee! Juldee!*"

I brought them right over my folded bedding and wraps. They never lifted them. But they smiled sweetly and resented nothing.

The Wazir had promised me a good pony.

A shy, delicate-looking little creature, brown,

with black, tangled mane and tail, was produced, saddled, I got away.

How exquisite were the morning views! Large spots of rain fell. Grey clouds, massive, portentous, moved among the mountains.

Instead of sun-piercing rays came blessed silver rain, soft as Scottish mist, mysteriously drying as it fell.

Coming up the gorge and the street I had not noticed the number of steps. Now we seemed to be deliberately walking downstairs, Thibetan monastery stairs, the highest steps in the world, all the way, but my little beast was nimble and willing.

A wide view spread behind the lonely Gate of Virtue. Stolid, square, well-proportioned, it stood forth in vivid foreground against a wild, lonely stretch of broken, dropping, brown desert, running to the feet of truly the weirdest range of mountains in the world. Deeper into Thibet, they may assume yet vaster proportions, but their rugged, dashing, precipitous fold on fold of rocky variegation must be the same if on a mightier scale. The altitude of the flat desert is already some 10,000 feet, peaks above more than double that height.

Paghspa joined me before I reached the bottom of the slope, and the little wood, where I would not stop. I applied my switch to my little steed and gladly found he broke into the real amble, a kind of run, more like a dog's than the trot of a horse.

Again we traversed stony desert. A few pilgrims were on the path. Another wood, enclosed by a stone wall, at long last broke the monotony.

Impossible to describe the charm and delight of swaying green leaves, grass, running water in the heart of aridity. Blue iris were blooming, as they have nearly all our way. They were small, punctilious in make, exactly resembling the fleur-de-lis of France. And by a tiny rivulet stood a clump that were snow-white.

May my heart not forget the throb it gave!

Snow-white, pure, everlastingly sweet, bravely they unfurled; but a few yards away lay stony desert for miles and miles.

Oh! consider the lilies of the field. . . .

Lifting rein and on again, skirting the green wood, out once more on desert plain. Flat, yet sloping upward gently, it stretched away to mountains on the right, mountains on the left, traversed down its centre by the silver, splitting Indus.

Presently on its farther bank a rock upreared, crowned by a monastery. On my own side lay a scattered village among stretches of green barley and sparse poplar trees.

"Chushot?" I asked, hopefully pointing with my switch.

"Ani," Paghspa grunted.

I hoped he meant Yes. It had a pleasantly affirmative sound, but still we pursued the desert path, tantalisingly level with green fields.

On and on we went, I turning back on my saddle

to inquire, Paghspa pointing vaguely onwards with his whip.

It was borne in upon me that he meant to pause at Leh, only twenty-two miles from Haemis.

I halted firmly.

"Chushot tiffin[1]!" I remarked, for I had not learnt the word for night, so could not convey it was to be spent there.

Somehow I made him understand the pack-ponies were to stop.

He shouted to a man in a house, who came out, well-dressed in long cloth coat and hat to match.

He pointed to a small Bagh, or wood; I climbed a broken wall, gained the grass and the pleasure of green trees. It was no larger than a village pound.

Paghspa spread his mat under a tree. Beneath my tattered mackintosh, (a pony had put his foot through it,) I slept for twenty minutes. Awakened, it was only nine-thirty.

With overcast weather, no sun to dread, nothing easier than to ride on; but I had done eleven miles and must wait for dawdling pack-ponies, for I had no food.

It was here that Paghspa proved himself not only one of those undoubted genius, who, having made up his mind, leaves no stone unturned to attain his desire, but also a ministering angel.

He knelt at my side. Opening a curious, dark-looking shawl with the air of a merchant displaying rich wares, he exposed cold chicken, bread, butter,

[1] Luncheon.

cold potatoes, jam, and from some other mysterious recess, produced a silver spoon.

Fire was already alight, his kettle boiling. He poured hot tea into the thick glass I always carry. A rough oatmeal scone, called *kultcher*, and potatoes were warmed in the ashes. Sitting on his mat I was soon devouring the luncheon of a king.

My only anxiety now were the ponies. "*Sta*? *Khana*?" I asked, meaning "Pony? Dinner?" gesticulating vociferously, gobbling an immense amount of imaginary food from a manger.

He went to the stone wall and set up those shouts, which, like all else in this land, are of gigantic proportion. High altitude deepens lungs, they say, possibly the capacity of emitting noise. Shawms and gongs are as peace beside Paghspa shouting.

Gallant as always, with floating turban ends, the two lads of the Wazir's party appeared on the stony ridge.

The Wazir next came with the rest of his retinue. He, too, was of opinion I should push on.

"And if the ponies get no food?"

"They'll do very well without it!"

But Paghspa's appeal had been answered.

I turned to find them devouring green and reed-like grass.

At ten-thirty we were off again, trotting or tripling along at a pace about as easy as sitting on a bus. Still in the desert, which stretched smoothly as sand upwards to mountains that rose abruptly from it as a hay-rick from a meadow. One could put a

finger on the exact spot where desert slope met mountain precipice. On an upstanding rock, tall cream houses with red roofs huddled together exactly as one sees in Italy. Far behind and above them jagged mountains, blue as gentians, over-topped others that were translucently pale. Grey day, fleeting clouds increased their height. And at last we came again to the many bridges, crossed three days previously. I grieved we had not again meandered through mazy village paths and over multitudinous water-courses; though doubtless the longest way, (desert way,) round was our shortest way home.

River, happy vale and distant Spitug were speedily at our backs. We set forth over the bleakest, barest, most deserted desert yet traversed. Steadily uphill we mounted to a mere crevice in the mountains, developing into a gorge, a crack in a corner of the wide landscape. Sometimes the path lost itself among pebbles and boulders, sometimes Scriptures were fulfilled:—"Prepare ye the way, make straight the paths . . ." Pebbles were pushed to either side, making a baby road, often deep in sand.

We passed a long *Mani* wall, gaining merit, I trust, by keeping it on the right. Looking round the great wilds it was easy to imagine ice-storms and fierce winds, demon kings, driving winter blasts from eternal snows, screaming down gorges, flinging up sand in whirls, beating down stinging hail, and there seemed indeed merit to those who

LEH, FROM THE FIELDS.

lay consecrated stones, forming the long isolated wall across the wind-swept desert, beneath whose shelter, sorely pressed human and other creatures could creep, saved for a whole mile from the fury of the blast.

Only towards the end did my patient little steed flag, fall into walk, after long, steady uphill, feet clogged with sand. Even then, the instant his hoofs struck rock, he jig-joggled on again, without causing me the slightest jerk. Had Paghspa been equally well mounted, we would have made famous way, but he had a sorry nag, and pony-like, they held together. The horse is a gregarious beast.

At last we were in the narrowing gorge, another *Mani* wall ran down its middle, while chortans cheerfully appeared at the far end. Leh, no doubt, was just beyond them.

Alas ! for these elastic deserts !

We came right through a mountain spine, terminating, as we now saw from the farther side, in the high spur that is Spitug, but only to regain desert.

Some distance across it, beneath yet greater snowy heights, lay a sweet stretch of green fields, doubtless our goal.

On and on, the distance folding up, until a final *Mani* wall and clustered white chortans lay beneath an astounding, jagged ridge, topped at three points, rising each higher than the other, by palace, monastery and fort.

Through a doorway in a wall off the desert we surprisingly went through a square gateway into the

very heart of the city. The bazaar was wide, edged with low, uneven houses, fretwork balconies, tall poplars, uprising abruptly at the far end to temple balls, cliffs, chortans and the palace, perched sheer above, rising in stern walls of nine stories of windows.

King Trashi built it about 1500 or 1530 A.D. The ferocious monarch blinded his elder brother and usurped his palace, but the wheel of time turned inexorably. He had no son. His elder brother survived him, and was much loved as a sort of lay-figure king, while his son reigned in his stead.

In and out of narrow, winding mud-houses, adorned with sticks and flags. A rippling brook by a roadside. A high garden under trees. An English house with roses and creepers over the porch.

Leh at last, and little Helen ran out to greet me in her very own home!

UNDER THE PALACE, LEH.

CHAPTER XXIV

July 27th. The Roof of the World.
(Or if not quite the roof, then the attics.)

TWELVE thousand feet high am I sitting on short green turf under willow trees by a burbling brook. The others are stringing very thin worms on hooks and pulling little fish out of it.

Behind me rears a village that, half a mile off across the plain, looks exactly like a tall European mediæval city, red-roofed and poplar grown, clustering up a small summit.

Beneath me lie a few deserts, some bright green patches and many mountain ranges. Not one landscape but several, each on differing levels. Air is delicious, but altitude shortens breath. Immense mountains, two peaks snow-crowned, rise above vast purple heaps. They are mere specks in the distance around us, yet are vast, untrodden worlds.

In one of his bursts of oratory Lloyd George declared that clouds were rolling away, revealing peaks,—" the highest among them, Sacrifice."

So the Mem Sahib calls the loftiest of them all, Sacrifice.

When clouds gather and conceal all other tops,

Sacrifice cleaves them with pure, white peak and slopes.

"Look at that mountain!" little Helen cried, "all alone by itself, right up in the sky. How did it get there? Do you know, auntie?"

Nearly every afternoon we forgather, the few English who have penetrated to this far corner, and take walks or rides between grey stone walls along little paths that are often water-courses, sometimes unpleasantly wet, when irrigation loosens fresh streams upon us. We leap from boulder to boulder, or climb up to fields above, where green barley grows. The black and white magpie is with us, and a little grey bird whose lower body is suddenly red as it spreads its wings, a redstart. Tiny ferns and a white bell flower with delicate grey leaf peer from crannies of rock. Blue and purple iris still rear the fleur-de-lis. An occasional hoopoe, with cinnamon-coloured crest and coat, flashes a black and white barred body and tail. Bearded wheat, deliciously green, climbs from terrace to terrace, intersected with gay, silver rills. Stark and stony stand up distant, steep mountains. Scarps gleam bright yellow in sunlight against deep blue ranges in shade. Hobgoblin chortans chase each other up lower slopes. Tawny peaks, just above, are crowned by monastery and castle ruins. Colour, light, distance, sunshine and indescribable freshness charm the translucent air. No mosquitoes, flies or gnats trouble the summer calm.

Chortans rise above the fields in great, square,

white blocks, rising to round domes or knobs, whence sometimes spring, like a spire, thirteen red rings, for the thirteen ages or æons of man. We are now in the thirteenth and last, expecting the liberation of the *Maitreyah*, the Redeemer, the Loved One. This is the age of "Kali," the "bad age" of the Hindus. Instead of the red rings there are sometimes three balls, for earth, (desire,) heaven, (form,) and air, (formlessness).

Sometimes, however, they represent sun, moon and stars, the moon then is a crescent.

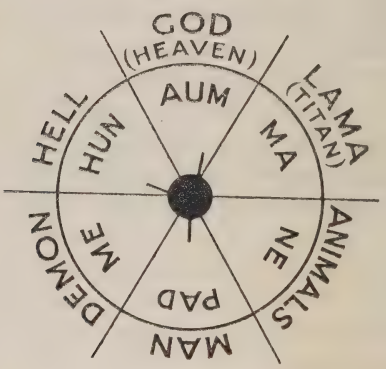
Putting finger and thumb into a hole or crack in the side, one may pull out a small, white, miniature chortan. These are the ashes of a holy Lama. After burning they have been stirred in with white clay, well pounded and formed into this little, white pot.

Tablets of inscription are frequently let into the inner wall. Dr Francke collected much of his valuable information and history of Western Thibet from these writings.

Some of our party steal the flat stones off the *Mani* walls for paper-weights. Words are beautifully engraved upon them. "*Aum mani padme hun*," in fantastic Buddhist or Sanskrit lettering. Each syllable of the sacred text stands for a spoke in the Wheel of Life, that wheel of Existence on which every creature of this planet is bound by the force of the Unconscious Will, acted upon by Desire, of which Sloth, Anger and Greed forge the chains, so that on the change called death, man passes

from one phase of existence to another, his destiny determined by his acts, if bestial, then a beast, if manly, then a man. Europeans often give the secondary, possibly lesser, rendering of the text as "God, the jewel in the lotus," the lotus being the symbolical flower of Buddhism.

Here is the explanation, founded on the Wheel of Life, given me by a Thibetan :—



This places the spokes in different order to those of some of the pictures. Possibly the order of rotation is irrelevant, for it alters with each individual.

Each syllable teaches its own lesson, teeming with meaning. The yellow Lama meditates on the first word OM, or AUM, containing among other mysteries that of the Trinity ; while the red Lama concentrates on the last hieroglyphic, "hun," (pro-

nounced here, "hong,") the final upward curve of which may lead the meditator from undesirable surroundings through pain and realization of earthly futility to the path to Nirvana.

That the Lamas are divided into sects was news to me. From 1378 to 1441 A.D. the great Buddhist reformer Tsong-Kapa tried his best to purify the land of Bon Chos, Shamanism and other animistic beliefs, and bring the Lamas to the high philosophy of Gautama. He wished them to put away the red robe of blood-sacrificing priests and wear the yellow garments of the pure doctrine. To what extent he succeeded may be drawn from the fact, easily translated into parable, that certain among the Lamas took to wearing yellow hats and scarves. These are "the followers of the virtuous order," the "yellow Lamas" as opposed to those wholly red.

Tsong-Kapa found two kings in Western Thibet, Lde and Dragspa. Dragspa was the younger, but so violent he took by force half his brother's kingdom. When the great reformer came he first visited Dragspa, showing him a document written in his own blood; but "he did not deign to look at it with so much as one eye." He went on to Leh, presented it to King Lde, who was "delighted with it." The king built, (though there are those who say it sprang into existence miraculously,) the monastery of Spitug and founded the first of "the virtuous sect." [1]

[1] See Dr Francke, "History of Western Thibet."

King Lde tried to stop sacrifice. The heart of a living goat was torn from its body once or twice a year in every village. He published by rock-inscription his edict:—"The living sacrifice is abolished." [1]

Yet another kind of chortan is found outside each village. Three small chortans are placed on a kind of high booth, somewhat like a small theatre, so that our Mem Sahib calls them, "Punch and Judy shows." The little stage within is lined by pictures. Generally a kindly white-faced Buddha sits in the centre, surrounded by evilly-disposed demons, depicted in red and blue, from whom it is to be hoped he saves his devout followers. The three handsome little chortans have their sides painted all over with red and blue eye-balls; for such I am told the gay balls, suspended in bunches on graceful strings, are meant to represent. The little spires of thirteen red rings rise above them, or else the three balls, each smaller than the last. They are generally well kept, gay with bright paint and gilding, making beautiful foregrounds to far distant mountains.

Houses are adorned with a goblin collection of twigs or crazy sticks, little bits of muslin with texts stamped on them flutter like flags, quaint, weird, yet somehow singularly lovable. A tiny, white goat may peer down from among them, or the gnomish, ugly face of a pleasantly smiling, old woman.

On the wall of the house of a holy man can be seen something that looks like a frail piece of rigging

[1] See Dr Francke, "History of Western Thibet."

from a ship. This cherished possession should guard the inhabitants from illness and disease. It is a piece of the *Storma*. At the time of the New Year, falling later than ours, much is done to protect the people from demon-malignity, especially under the form of disease. The year is guarded from coming ill. Lamas have already prepared the *Storma*, an erection from twenty to thirty feet high of twigs lashed together with twine and cord, giving the impression of a complicated mast. Processions of Lamas, including so-called devil-dancers in masks, form at the monastery, proceed through the town, erect the *Storma* in the desert. Those who rank highest among them are ranged about it. Others form separate circles around fires, into which little images are thrown with incantations. They contain evil spirits of diseases. They pass many hours, drinking hot tea, crowding round the fires.

Finally, the tall *Storma* is pulled down. The crowd rushes up, seizes little bits, bearing them in triumph to their homes, placing them in prominent position to guard them through the coming year.

Near the house of this sacred piece of *Storma* stands an ancient stone, a crude block. Gautama, the Buddha, is rudely depicted upon one side. On the other a picture is scratched of the *Maitreya*, the Loving One, the last Buddha, the final Redeemer, yet to appear. His hands are turned, one palm inwards, the other out. I hope to learn the signification.[1]

[1] The hand turned in retains the electric life current. The hand turned out bestows it.

Little prayer-wheels, dropped between rocks to protect them, are set in streams. Fishing-rod in hand, short-cutting through wet meadows, we come upon them.

A woman near, minding a cow and gathering grass, a lamb at her heels, looked up from under her turquoise *paragh*, smiled sweetly to me, as, trying to show her some understanding, I formed words on lips, shut eyes devoutly and waved upward to One listening. She nodded and agreed.

All the time she works the great prayer-wheel prays.

. . . . . .

A stroll through the city is always amusing, though the bazaar is disappointingly empty. Small shops are stacked with Lipton's tea, tin funnels, bricks of Thibetan tea, stuff hats worn by the men, but few curios. These are brought round to verandahs by men who bring out of their sashes brass or copper tea-pots, shaped like vases, embroideries, shawms, wooden cups with silver linings, long-handled quaintly curved spoons, a Lama's bell, rosary and the begging bowl,—a human skull. Sometimes they show an empty hand praying-wheel, but the reel of prayer has been abstracted before it is offered to an infidel.

For fine woollen stuff they tell us to wait the coming of the caravans. These cannot penetrate from Yarkand until snow is sufficiently melted on high passes.

A Yarkandi merchant, whose wife we visited, a

IN THE BAZAAR, LEH.

lovely woman, full of sad charm and dignity, told us trade has not yet recommenced with Russia. Some of the bolder had penetrated and even returned, but many had been robbed and killed. Trade might be considered abandoned.

Women stand at street corners under heavy turquoise *paraghs* and black lamb's-wool ear-flaps, baskets of green stuff on their backs, over their silky goat-skin cloaks. The fur, worn inwards, hangs from the edge of rough skin like a silver fringe. On their wrists they wear heavily chased silver cuffs, holding back sensible, home-spun, dark cloth sleeves. On the left breast dangle a row of little, silver picks. Held in place by a round brass ornament, small brass needle-cases and other household treasures are suspended from the waist with quantities of dangling, white shells. Handsome necklaces of chased gold clamps, alternating with strings of turquoise and coral, lie round their brown throats. Large looping rings of rows of seed pearls hang from their ears. All the time spindles are twirling from their busy fingers, long threads of wool are spinning while they walk or chat. They smile if one calls, "*Joo*," answering back with a cordial, "*Joo-lay*!" and chuckle if one lays a hand on some tiny tottler's round, capped head.

The little one looks up, sees with scared fright a horrible, white face, bursts into a roar and toddles off to hide in a laughing woman's skirt, peering out a moment later to see if one is still there and truly so alarming. The men, too, with the ruggedest,

ugliest faces break into smiles of archangel sweetness. Nor must I forget the very smallest calves that were ever seen, brown and shaggy, trotting like dogs at their mistress's heels; or silken snow-white and jet-black, little goats with fine horns.

Out on a far stream-side we found just such a wee, silken, snow-white goatie, wandering alone under its baby horns, fine as a deer's.

"He is mine!" I said to little Helen.

She played with him for an hour, lugging him hither in her arms, little petticoats hitched up, showing plump legs under his weight. She wanted to take him home. He followed faithfully.

"He is really yours, isn't he, auntie?"

"No, dear, he was mine for an hour. Now he must go back to his own mummie."

Quite unwillingly he went.

. . . . . .

July 19th, 1922. Leh.

We are sitting on a low, broken wall, the Mem Sahib and I, just outside the town. The enormous cliff wall of the monastery rears behind us. Before us women are weaving.

They have two small wooden frames, holding rows of upright sticks about forty-five feet apart, a foot and a half across. To and fro four of them go with balls of wool off their spindles. They exchange with each other at the exact middle, marked by a stick placed across two stones. Each two goes back to the far end, hands the ball to an

old man squatting beyond it, who fixes the wool round a stick on the frame, and back they come to meet each other again. This forms the woof running the whole length. The man at each end is ready with bobbin to ply the warp and criss-cross it into solid stuff. They are full of talk and chatter. Little children in rags run about among them.

A child in a long coat pulls it well up on his chest to scratch his little, brown self. The women peal with laughter.

A little later.

Evening gathers.

They have left the weaving. Women fetch big, gleaming pots in baskets on their backs, lift them down and put them under the brook, falling like a spout.

Now the old man is running two sticks, one worked in, the other out the reverse way, like two huge, darning needles, at the top across the length of the woollen strands. A watching woman stands, basket on back, nodding her head.

"By my mother's flesh," she tells us, "he has ability!"

A man passes in handsome cloth coat, closely followed by a wee, black goatie.

"If I have no he-human-child," he says, looking down on the pretty, little creature gazing up at him, "I must have a he-goat-child. He is happy with me. I feed him on apricots."

July 20th, 1922.

His Holiness, the Abbot of Haemis, is here, otherwise known as the Skushogh.

He ambles through the bazaar on a stout pony or strolls afoot, surrounded by Lamas, extending the fat hand of a prosperous prelate in blessing to those who bob, curtsey and prostrate.

A ray of kindly intelligence lit his face when he proffered the gift of a Chinese purse to little Helen.

If he is a man of deep learning, no hint of it is betrayed to outsiders on face or in manner; nevertheless, he may be an expert at the long, deep, philosophical discussions we are told endure for hours among the instructed.

His great ability in dealing with the vast monastery property, extending far into Thibet, where he visits monastic farmers, who render account of flocks, herds, grain and produce, beside their many money transactions, is well known throughout the land. Doubtless, too, he is highly skilled in the game of chess. One of our champions, accustomed to setting chess problems in papers, told me he was never able to make more than six or seven moves against any Lama during his three years' stay in their land, and never won a game.

Englishmen say the Skushogh is a man of no mean understanding to have survived thirteen and a half years of solitary confinement in a cave, meditating, and be able, as he undoubtedly is, to

read newspapers and take an interest in all-world affairs.

Great shawms, huge pipes, boom out deep, weird notes every night from heights above on the clear moonlit air in honour of his visit.

They swell, they come, they fill the atmosphere with rich, vibrating spine-thrilling, dramatic tones. They die upon the breeze, float away into far distance, return and swell again.

"Isn't it kind of the Lama," little Helen asks earnestly in her cot on the sleeping-porch, "to give us such a nice band?"

CHAPTER XXV

A Visit to a Hermit.

THE Thibetan Christian minister of the Moravian Church came to tea.

Judging from his hesitation, our meals are as fraught with possible danger to them as theirs to us, though he was too courteous a gentleman not to dissemble any scruple he may have entertained.

In dark, claret-coloured, cloth coat he mounted a nag behind mine and away we ambled, first among fields over stony paths or water-courses, next on to a bit of desert, where stood the *ghats* or square mud-made blocks for burning the dead.

The nearest of kin has the unpleasant task of making certain his relative's decease by kneeling on his chest, jerking the head forward and breaking the neck. This also has the desired effect of loosening the spirit, if haply it should be lingering.

"Then he grow something else," a Thibetan boy explained to me. "Should he done nicely, he grow man. If he done badly, then animals or something else!"

The spine is also broken. After this the corpse can easily be rolled into a tight ball, tied with rope. Much eating, drinking, weeping, proceeds with the

family. Finally, it is brought to the *ghat*, burnt in white clothes, while oil is poured on liberally.

Happily the *ghats* stood in deserted silence. We turned the shoulder of a great mountain, crossed a bay, as it were, of sand in the shelter of the mountain range. Facing us across the desert, high up on the rocks, was the lonely habitation of a hermit.

"People cross here every day, bringing him food. Never let him starve! Even when winter wind bitter cold," my companion told me. "The old hermit is dead. I not know who here now."

Jigglety-jogglety we went to the foot of the rocks, where, the ponies entirely declining to climb, we proceeded to scramble on foot, I, with many a helpful push from the Christian.

Half-way up I was overtaken not only with loss of breath, but bad spasm of annoyance.

Chink of chisel, thump of hammers, finally half a dozen dark, ugly faces, brightening into smiles, looked down upon us.

"He is not alone!" I gasped.

"They are building. Perhaps it is to be a temple."

I tumbled among not only enormously high steps on the very edge of nothing, but also broken stones and débris, always to the amusement of these light-footed ones in clumsy felt bootikins, even when they attempt to conceal it.

Altitude and climb took all my breath.

A woman in *paragh* suddenly appeared, acting

hostess, much as a French curé's *femme de ménage* might have done.

"Monsieur l'ermite?" she seemed to be saying in clicky, nasal, one-syllable Thibetan. "Mais certainement! Il sera enchanté de la visite de Madame! Entrez, entrez, toujours. Malheureusement on fait des raccomodages! Mais, Zrigzin, je te prie! Aide un peu Madame!"

And so with noise and chatter I scrambled up the last stones, bent my head too late to avoid crashing solar topee against the low, wooden lintel of the door, came into something too small to be called courtyard, rather a stone room without a roof, peered into a darkened door.

As eyes grew accustomed to a place hardly bigger than a cupboard, a young man became visible seated on the floor behind a board, barely raised off the ground, serving him as table.

Upon it were the sacred objects, vases of holy water, of *ghee*, bell, wooden blocks of scripture, skull begging-bowl. Little banners hung behind him, small images stood on shelves. A vase full of peacock feathers was on the ledge of a minute square window. A rosary of red coral beads was twisted round his left wrist. He swung the *dorje*, (a brass object, shaped not only like a thunderbolt, but in a cross, the sign of Indra and of Jupiter,) between his second and third finger.

He was quite ready to talk.

"*Joo*," and "*Joo-lay*," passed between us. He indicated mats on the floor, where we sank.

The Moravian minister rapidly translated.

" For three years I have been alone in a cave. They passed me food. No one spoke. For three years I was alone. I meditated."

Asked if he meditated on holy words, he shook his splendid head of hair and pig-tail.

" No, I am not learned. I do not study. I read few scriptures. But every hour I think earnestly of those who sin, far in the valley below. All the time they sin ! They kill animals. They do things they know they should not. But I live away apart. I pray God. I say, ' Take my life ! Let it atone. Let it stand between their sin and its result ! '

" Here I begin a new life. The old hermit is dead. I take his place. Here people come to see me. I never eat but what they bring me. If they bring food, I eat. If not, I do not eat. Since I have begun this holy life, I have never had scissors to my hair ! " he shook his mane.

He was distinctly good-looking and intelligent. His features were of slightly Mongolian type, though his dark, curly hair saved him from any confusion with them. His manner was that of a well-brought-up young man in a drawing-room.

" Does he heal the people ? "

His eyes flashed.

" Ask them ! But ask them if I heal ! "

All the workmen were squatting on their heels, heads thrust into the door, not to lose a single word. One youngster laid his head sideways upon the pate of an old man, shaven till where the pig-tail

hung. The four eyes, quite near together, looked at us from different slants.

They were intensely interested.

"He will heal by charms," the Moravian minister told me. "They have many charms." [1]

"They bring young boys for me to see," the young hermit continued. "I look at them and judge what sin they committed in last existence, so they can atone and escape the consequences."

The woman in *paragh*, smiling, handed a hot bowl of tea to each of us. She thrust an arm over heads of squatting men, clustering closely like a bunch of grapes.

Space was so restricted she could easily touch anyone of us three.

The tea was delicious.

It is not popularly considered so by Europeans, being doubtless made from Thibetan brick tea, square chumps, apparently forced together in much the same way as seamen's tobacco. Butter and salt were in it, not a hint of tannin. It tasted like wholesome soup. The hermit handed me a little bowl of raw peas off his own table, evidently a special offering to him. We split the pods, ate the tender, new, green peas with lumps of sugar-candy. My companion enjoyed the repast thoroughly. I laid my wooden bowl with silver lining upon the floor. He thought I was leaving the tea.

[1] Colonel Waddell writes of three charms :—
1. For the body. (To save sickness.)
2. For the speech. (To give victory in disputations.)
3. For the mind. (To obtain all desire.)

" Please finish ! " he whispered. " They think it unlucky if you leave ! "

A courteous way of reminding one of manners.

I was glad to take it. It was hot to the last drop.

Giving back the bowl of peas I inadvertently pushed the bell.

" Do you think my touch pollutes ? " I asked.

The young hermit seized a small silver image of the Buddha from the shelf above him, waved it fanatically. His mobile face expressed the evil passions of the blue and red demons.

" He say, not hurt touch things on table ; but if you touch Buddha you get very bad hurt ! No one save you from terrible ill-luck ! "

" Tell him the God whom Gautama the Buddha and Ihesu Machika knew would not harm anyone."

Instantly his face changed.

A sweet, beatific expression drove away his fierceness like sun breaking upon storm-clouds.

He replaced the silver image and waved to a blue demon-god banner.

" He say, Gautama would do no hurt, but that other one very bad ! He say, no one know how good God is, more than father, more than mother."

" Ask him if he knows the power we gain through forgiving, as Ihesu Machika taught it ? "

A look of perplexity, of thought, passed over the young face.

" We must never forgive until we are asked for forgiveness," he said. " But though we do not forgive, we must forbear."

The answer seemed to come from his heart, possibly from his own thought.

It seemed to me in the short interview, rendered pleasant by the gentleness of both men, their earnest endeavour to meet one's point of view, that the suggestibility of these people is most vivid. A word in one direction, thundercloud and storm. A word in another, sweetness and serenity. An exceptional character, such as the hermit, cannot, of course, stand for the race, yet such little as I am able to judge of these people makes me believe this to be true of them all. Pious, devout, kindly, a people easily played upon by priest-craft.

The Moravian fidgeted on the floor. It was time to end our visit.

I presented my offering and received the young hermit's distressed apologies that he had nothing to give me.

"But you have given me tea," I said. "Better still, a welcome and your friendship. And we both know the God who loves your people."

His face shone. He swung the *dorje* between his fingers, turned his head upward. We left him in an attitude of meditation and of prayer.

Standing in the doorway of his rocky habitation, the naked edge of steep, broken steps falling off sheer into space on the left, I balanced against a wooden post and gazed over deserts on differing levels to clear-cut, wide, distant ranges, high, snow-crowned, and felt indeed on the dizzy top of the world.

Half-way down the hill I stopped my guide. It seemed unfair that he should take all the trouble and receive less than the hermit, whom he had been taught to regard as a heathen, so I sent a present to his children.

He hesitated.

" Would it be unkind of me to take it ? " he asked earnestly.

" It would be unkind not to take it," I replied promptly. " Unkind to the children, and unkind to me, who have none ! "

We passed queer, weird piles of stones, tip-tilted till they looked like comical, mad, little gnomes.

" Why do they put them up ? " I asked.

" It is children do it ! " he replied.

I knew it was not, but honoured him for refraining to hold up his fellow-countrymen to what he feared might be my ridicule.

Abuse of other men's religions was not the chief corner-stone of his own.

Eerie, fluttering, little luck-flags on crooked twigs hung out on stones.

Again I asked what these might mean.

" They are little ponies of the air," he replied. " They ride in the wind and carry off all that is ill and bad."

I wondered if this were his own poetic rendering, but back in my quiet rooms, ten minutes to spare before dinner, I opened Colonel Waddell's fascinating book,

By strange coincidence for the first time I lit upon the very subject and found these incantations :—

"May the airy horse of this charm-holder be raised sublimely."

"Oh, may this charm-holder be given the undying gift of soul everlasting, as the adamantine cross *dorje* herein pictured."

. . . . . .

I have a little home of my own. It is the Single Sister's House. The bedroom windows, side by side, look upon little Helen's garden. We have pleasant chat while she weeds. My sitting-room windows are in two walls. While sun glares without I sit in cool, shaded breeze, writing at this book on paper bought with difficulty in the bazaar.

Nothing more delightful than to push open the windows in early morning, not too early either, disentangle white, muslin curtains from the wind and look through waving poplar leaves to the brilliant green of young corn, smooth and flat under the intense purple of mountain slopes.

I must go out on the little verandah to look up and away to the snowy height of Sacrifice.

. . . . . .

The Wazir's Party, July 22nd.

When a Wazir gives a party it is not a ten minutes' affair. This can be seen by casting the eyes down the programme that accompanied our invitations.

PROGRAMME.

1.	Prayer and Drama, by schoolboys.	3 p.m. to 3.30
2.	Children play.	3.30 to 4.0
3.	Tea.	4.0 to 4.30
4.	Lama dance.	4.30 to 6.0
5.	Rest.	6.0 to 8.0
6.	Dinner.	8.0 to 9.30
7.	Tall man.	9.30 to 9.40
8.	Chicken.	9.40 to 9.50
9.	Lion.	9.50 to 10.5
10.	Snake.	10.5 to 10.20
11.	Old man with his son.	10.20 to 10.25
12.	Pony-riding.	10.25 to 10.40
13.	Kashmiri Pundit.	10.40 to 10.55
14.	Marhati.	10.55 to 11.5
15.	Sword Dance.	11.5 to 11.10
16.	Boat and Amban.	11.10 to 11.20

No one knows the time at Leh, though it is true it is wired through daily; but who cares about time with no train to catch? No one was surprised when we hastened up the long, tree-shaded path of the Wazir's garden that we were already late; the schoolboys had finished their prayer and begun the drama.

We sat in a verandah on easy-chairs and couches, mats and small tables before us, a long row of distinguished guests, nearly all English, except the Wazir himself and a few officials. His ladies were invisible throughout the entire entertainment, though, I was told, they managed to see all that went on.

Lifting the words oddly at end of sentences, the boys went through an ordinary, little bazaar scene,

including an attempted theft, in very creditable English.

After this effort there rose from the happy crowd of dust-coloured coats, turquoise *paraghs* and dark dresses, a flock of children. Merrily they played our old, English games, taught them by the Single Sisters in their own Thibetan tongue.

Shrieks of delighted laughter from proud mothers and amused fathers greeted the homely gambols of,—" Here we go round the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush. . . ." Washing the hands, combing the hair aroused the hilarity of the unwashen crowd.

How much food the Wazir provided that day I do not know, for most of his guests by caste necessity ate apart. I do know a very good tea was provided for his English friends under an open marquee, gaily hung with beautiful embroideries. A large square table, chairs set round it, offered a substantial repast. Little nuts and sweets were an acceptable Indian addition to an otherwise strictly English tea-table.

Back again in the long verandah we found Lamas from Haemis had arrived with masks, shawms, drums, Chinese embroideries. The band squatted in a corner of the lawn, long pipes lying out before them. Even the man in high, yellow hat, like an ancient Roman helmet, was personally conducting the ceremonies.

Yet, though they pirouetted, twirled, suspended feet and pounced on them to long-drawn, spine-shaking, melancholy notes, it was but the empty

shell, the forlorn shadow of their Festival. No intoning of Scriptures gave key to the movement. Instead of baffling sense of mystery and meaning behind each movement of unknown coherence, they meant no more than the drilling, no doubt necessary before movement can be allied with underlying emotion. It was physical exercise. They were the pot-hooks and hangers of mystical lettering that never appeared.

The little elephant with the red pig-tail was there. Every antic seemed to agree with the grinning masks. White-faced Buddhas, red and blue demons, stags and black devils, flags and streamers, huge hats and rattles, colour, whirl and twirl blended indescribably.

Finally, they all swept away.

Six women in splendid turquoise *paraghs*, sheepskin cloaks, covered with scarlet and fine embroidery, seed-pearl earrings, silver cuffs, great necklaces rose in circle, gyrated slowly to pipes and drums. Step by step, gazing solemnly at their upturned toes, they moved at a pace few would describe as dancing, always together in sober rhythm. My neighbour, who had passed years among them, whispered to me that these dancers were high caste women. Far from being looked down upon, they were excused from bearing burdens and much honoured in the community. The *paragh* is intended to represent a snake, the rows of coral, protruding on one side, being the tail. An English colonel told me he thought it exactly like the hood of a cobra when

raised. Only Buddhist women wear them. It was brought from Thibet by a queen, and at first only queens could wear them. Little by little the custom crept in, one row was allowed, then two, until at last all took to wearing them. The eldest daughter inherits the mother's *paragh*, together with all portable property. The eldest son inherits the land. He it is who ranks as husband and father, where brothers share a wife. Polyandry, at least under these easy conditions where women abound, together with freedom, work in field and farm, make happier women than the polygamy of India. How much climate is responsible may be questioned. Doubtless climate and other circumstances, more than individual taste, force both conditions of life.

The woman has a position, a dictatorship, especially, when in absence of elder brothers she inherits land, that is possibly unknown among her neighbours and certainly adds to her felicity and merriment.

Meanwhile the women continued their slow dance. The hand hidden in the bosom gradually came out. Tightly folded, it upturned and unfolded. Even so in spring the seed lies hidden, slowly it creeps forth, bears upward, like the folded hand, quietly opens its green leaves.

The women's fingers began to flutter. Boys in the crowd started to whistle. Women laughed. Men called to them to whistle louder. They did. Higher, shriller rose their notes. Noise increased,

band grew louder, crowd called and laughed, boys whistled with all their might. They were whistling for birds in spring.

Spring had come. The dancing ceased. Gladly we rose to take our two hours' rest. Eyes still skipping, ears buzzing, with colour, movement and music.

. . . . . .

Dinner was within the house at the same immense table. Again the English entertained each other. Cooks trained in their service prepared an orthodox seven-course dinner. This may have been in deference to King Edward. A lady present told us she had partaken of twenty-five courses in former days. We were sipping coffee when the Wazir came to fetch us to the verandah on the lawn.

A square bonfire burned in the centre. Flames leaping upward lighted the scene. Sparks flew up, trying to top the flickering, black leaves.

Joyous, childlike episodes, heaped fast, one upon another, were hailed with delight by us all. Never was anything more spontaneous, ridiculous or gay.

The tall man was not on stilts. A man ran about where his legs should be, supporting mock head, shoulders, arms and body on a mast, draped with appropriate clothes and mask, swaying ludicrously from side to side. The arms flopped. The face bent over to the fire.

The secret, if there were any, was hopelessly given away when he pranced between us and the

bonfire. Leaping flames lit, like Röntgen rays, the skeleton within the clothes. Weird yet ridiculous, all enjoyed the fun.

The chicken was yet more comical. A huge skin covered with feathers, a man within, whose two lean, long legs ran about in admirable imitation of a barnyard rooster; above all, when he suddenly flopped, turned the skinny neck backward, buried the beak in hind feathers and agitated it fussily.

Roars of laughter rose from the crowd, nor was the verandah silent.

The lion was a big, ungainly beast with massive mane, apparently somewhat hampered in movement, though easier after relieving himself, (regardless of nature or of the feelings of ladies, whispering warnings to each other of the untimely event,) of a baby-lion, who, no less embarrassed by reference to natural occurrences, resembled a monkey rather than his parent. Both gambolled together, once free of each other, in a way that was heartening to behold.

The snake should have been a masterpiece, but its effect was marred by assiduous attention from the kerosene-bearer, who poured far too much light upon the scene from an ugly, old, black bottle, emptying it on the blazing bonfire.

The snake was an immensely long, thin paper-lantern, lit from within, borne in the air at certain intervals by running boys, whose heads were buried in its body. Extending in circles, twisting, turning, squirming, the long, brightly-lit body in utter

darkness should have been a wild, wicked serpent, coiling in the air; but the brilliant flare of bonfire flames outshone the feebler light of paper-lantern, showed up the dark legs of running boys and turned the snake into a centipede.

The old man and his son was a man with a doll as a baby, rather commonplace after late excitements.

The next two episodes did not appear. Then a Baltistan leapt into the flare of light, twisting, twirling, not only his body but a sword around him, looking indeed like a snake, so swift were its gyrations, gleaming in the uncertain firelight, to be replaced by a Pathan with two swords, two snakes, yet swifter if possible, doubtless fired by emulation, so vigorous, breathless, fast, it was relief to us, if not to him, to see him stop and rest.

But the boat was the best of all. The Amban was a Chinese official. He arrived, full of dignity, not to say fuss, followed by attendants, mounted a throne and awaited his wife.

She came to him from the far-off corner of dim bushes in a little, rockety boat. Nothing so gay, so silly, so utterly absurd, so hopelessly delicious, so free in its antics, so sea-sicky in its rollings as that tiny boat.

Did it cross on firm land?

Never!

We saw the swelling water, the heave of wave, finally, the bitter crash upon rocks. The reckless, little boat had foundered. Helplessly it lurched

within cruel surf. The wife screamed for succour. Men ran, no, swam, I mean, to its assistance. Slowly it quieted, a great push, it was off again in deep water. Carefully, with much sobriety, it crossed the last, dark wild, came safely to the foot of the throne.

And what was this wonderful boat? The lady within the curtained canopy?

One man, who capered on his own legs across the lawn. About his middle a frail structure of wood outlined the boat, whence suspended the frilled curtain of a giddy petticoat, representing the sides of the boat. His legs did all the rocketing, boat-swaying, propelling of the light craft over invisible water, while his head was the bowing, gesticulating, soprano-screaming lady within the canopy.

Not even in *la Ville lumière* could one see swifter, more certain, more childlike, gay or serene piece of consummate acting.

The Wazir's party was over. The fire burnt low. The crowd dispersed, still bubbling with happy laughter. He shook hands with his guests, contented after six hours of entertainment.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Monastery in the Corn-fields.

Up through the green fields from Leh, scrambling over baby water-courses, dropped between meadows raised on stone walls, pausing here for a snow-white harebell, there for a fern, often for want of breath in the thin, pure air, (Leh is 11,000 feet high,) we passed three pretty little chortans, gay with eye-balls and painted pictures up on their sheltered shelf, then other big solitary chortans. We turned backwards for the superb view over several deserts, the high, green slope of Stock, where the ex-king of Ladakh lives with his Consort, looked farther and deeper into mountain ranges, dropped our eyes to a fine outlook on Leh Palace, jutting high, bare walls sternly out on the naked edge of the giant cliff.

We made the last ascent under trees, passed the final chortan, and under a square archway set in the walls turned into the cheeriest, prettiest, cleanest little monastery of them all.

Every little window had a clean muslin frill above it, bars of bright yellow and black paint beneath it. All were on differing levels, while straight lines of roof altered their height frequently. At the

corner by the gateway a little house stood on the house. Flag-rags and puckish, crooked switches fluttered gaily among flower-boxes. The wizened face of a kindly, dirty, old wizard in red robe peered down at the strange intruders.

Large fierce dogs, perpetually tied, bayed furiously, as happens in all monasteries. Young Lamas, roused by their turmoil, came lazily round corners in red and claret garments, warming to purple and other dim tints with the gentle touch of age and dirt.

Briskening at sight of us, they offered us welcome up the Temple steps.

Inordinately high, some broken, these stood in the centre of the main building under a porch it were worth climbing miles to see.

Chinese in effect, wood in five straight horizontal lines was painted an exquisite blue, thrown into bold relief with yellow, orange, green, red and gold scrolling.

Crimson pillars of shining lacquer upheld the porch, affording glimpses to dim crimson pillars, brass vessels, banners, mystery, through golden-red doors to the Temple.

On the three walls of the porch were fine paintings, particularly that of the Buddha on the right-hand side. His face was turned with a look of living interest. Behind it, tree, deer and the rest of the landscape faded into far perspective.

Opposite was a picture of the Wheel of Life, supported by a malignant demon, his hideous black

face rested on the wheel, his claws protruded from its sides.

Unfortunately one of those uncomfortable cupboards, built to ruin clothes, in common use throughout India and called Almiras, blocked the wall and covered half the wheel. So far as I could see it exactly resembled that of Spitug, which enables me to describe the latter, leaving travellers more intelligent than I to correct if necessary.

The hub of the wheel is surrounded by three creatures, representing the three fires of Desire, binding all life to the Wheel. At the foot a dark sloth represents sloth or stupidity. A snake is ill-will or anger; while we could not decide whether duck or dove, but certainly a bird, stands for lust or greed.

Within each spoke are tiny pictures, such as those familiar to us on Chinese porcelain. The Titans have a big tree growing in their left-hand corner, the fruit of which, unhappily out of their reach, is easily plucked by their celestial neighbours. This excites their rage to such extent that they are running all over their small space with slings, bows and arrows and other weapons to avenge themselves upon the angels.

Animals are spotted about the space below them.

Hell is just such a fiery furnace as one sees depicted in old-fashioned Christian propaganda. Tantalized demons show men of big stomachs but no throats. They cannot eat and are hungry and greedy. Small pictures of human life, a child on a mother's lap, a boy going to school, a man building a house are in the other spoke; and we hope by being sensible and good they will speedily mount to heaven above them.

It would be pleasant to pass on to the deeper philosophy of Gautama, the Buddha, show how he considered the lasting link to life to be in the Unconscious Will[1] that alone survives. It passes into fresh conformation, developing first consciousness, then self-consciousness, next sense-surface and understanding, so on through contact, feeling, desire and self-indulgence coming into fuller life, not omitting the ties and responsibilities of relationship until the Wheel turns again to decay and death, leaving nothing but the Productive Unconscious Will, ceaselessly worked upon, altered by man's thought and action throughout the round. A blind she-camel is this ignorant Productive Unconscious Will, led through the desert of Existence by the relentless driver, Karma, the chain of man's own consecutive action. The goading whips are the three fires of action,—greed, lust and anger; for as the body seeks for food, so does the Productive Ignorant Unconscious

[1] Some of these terms are borrowed from "Lamaism." Colonel Waddell.

Will grasp for futile desire. With the elimination of this idle desire arises sinless peace and wisdom: a state of bliss that to some seems extinction.

Looking into the faces of the Lamas, even with that able and sympathetic interpreter, the Mem Sahib, one realized the futility of expecting much from them. As in other ecclesiastical systems, an All-wise Providence clouds their intelligence to the level of those they have to teach.

Nor did I ever see a picture of the blind she-camel. At Spitug beside the Wheel of Life is a gay and lively portrait of a prancing elephant. A monkey on his back bears a hare upon his shoulder, whom a bird from a tree above is feeding with round, ripe fruit.

This, too, may teem with mystical meaning. Yet the only answer to questioning was :—

"The elephant so good! He makes all others happy!" And himself too, judging from his joyous tilt and cheerful, leering little eye.

But how describe the colourful, mystical, dim, sweet, incense-laden atmosphere of the Temple of our little monastery?

Back in the dark, mysterious twilight gleamed great Buddhas, gods and goddesses, incarnations of the Abbot, while banners hung down out of the lost blackness of the roof. Candles burned feebly. Holy vessels shone.

Over a huge step into the dim library where Scriptures, tied in boards, reposed on shelves, and yet more banners hung. Big masks, shawms, green

rattles were orderly disposed upon the floor of another big, bare room, walls covered with more paintings.

We climbed abnormally high steps to the flat roof, the glare of sun, the wide view and the petticoated poles, black ropes, hanging like skirts, were stylishly finished with broad, white binding at waist and halfway down it. Bold foreground to beautiful distances.

Seated on the parapet the Mem Sahib pointed out a small, projecting roof upon the roof. A big god was consecrated in the Temple below some two years since. Four Lamas, great artists from other monasteries, laboured upon the huge body, building it so high, this extra little piece of roof had to be reared above its head.

Then came a ceremony, chiefly held upon the roof, " to call the Spirit into the God." Libations, fire, incantations, sacrifice, shawms, gongs, rattles, incense solemnized the occasion.

We paused on the second floor on the way down to visit the temple of its presence.

Opinions differed as to sex. Avolakita, eleven-headed, was certainly beside it, while head rearing upon head like a tall mitre on the beautiful creature made some believe that Avolakita was here repeated. But the form was distinctly feminine, draped in places, nude where an immense turquoise was suspended. It was exquisitely moulded.

Lamas could render but little assistance to our perplexity,—the difficulty being that Europeans use different names for gods and incarnations to the Thibetans.

It was in 1640 A.D. that a Mongol prince conquered Thibet, gave political power to the leading Lama, with the title of Vast, (literally ocean,) Dalai. Thus the title of Dalai Lama, familiar to us, is foreign to the Thibetans, who call him Gyalwa Rin Poché, (gem of Majesty or Victory, or otherwise translated Precious Conqueror). Incarnation [1] is claimed for him from Avolakita, the Bodhisat, who is thus supposed to be eternally revived in the Dalai Lama (Rin Poché) of Lhasa. But Avolakita is again the Mongolian title, used only by foreigners, and we have not yet succeeded in identifying its Thibetan name. *Jahl Shuckshik*, which they certainly call him, (meaning Eleven-headed,) is probably only a secondary title. The *Maitreya*, (the expected Redeemer,) we have long since decided to be Chumba in Thibetan, but Avolakita still eludes us. His consort, called *Tara* by foreigners, is the Goddess of Mercy, the Queen of Heaven.

The Lama with us used a Thibetan word meaning Loving Mercy for the great figure, resplendent in brilliant colours, arms raying out like a huge shield or halo behind her, richly hung with jewels. Her feet were treading myriads of tiny demons, squirming like bunches of worms. Offerings of money, needles and shells lay between them, each representing a sin to be atoned.

Shells were brought by women, needles and coins by men.

[1] Colonel Waddell states there is uncertainty as to the exact date of evolving the incarnation theory, and is inclined to put the practice as late as the seventeenth century.

"Then the women are the greatest sinners!"

"They are the more repentant!"

"Count the needles."

These easily turned the balance of sin upon the men, though, from what one gathers, both sexes have plenty to repent. Many of the women live as gaily as they please till they suddenly reach sobriety somewhere in the middle forties, turn pious and pass the latter end of existence in pointing out and expostulating over the vice and frivolity of others. A state of things not limited geographically.

Yet they are not left without sufficient warning. In their Scriptures it is written :—

"The warders of Hell drag the wicked before the King of Hell, Zama, who says to them :—

"'Did you not when on earth see the four divine messengers sent to warn you,—the child, the old man, the sick, the criminal suffering punishment and the dead corpse?'

"And the wicked man answered :—

"'I did see them.'

"'And didst thou not think within thyself, I also am subject to birth, old age and death,—let me be careful to do good works?'

"And the wicked man answered :—

"'I did not, sire. I neglected in my folly to think of these things.'"[1]

A boy was with us, intelligent and keen, well-dressed in long, cloth coat and the customary hat, made somewhat like a coat-of-mail helmet, with

[1] Colonel Waddell on "Lamaism."

open scoop for the face, the brim upturned of the part that would otherwise hang round the neck, the edges cocking upwards with an impish air.

He was the elder son of a Rajah whose younger boy, a little fellow aged six, divinely discovered by horology, selection of holy objects and duly appointed by the Dalai Lama, (Rin Poché,) of Lhasa, had lately been inducted in this courtyard as Skushogh of Leh, Spitug and this place; a position of much political as well as of religious importance. His will be the task of reigning among the people, settling quarrels and giving final word upon disputes. Born shortly after the death of the late Skushogh, rumour hath it that he not only recognized and chose from among others the religious objects of the dead man, whom he is supposed to re-incarnate, but asked previously for his pony, dog and other more worldly possessions.

The ceremony of induction, postponed till his seventh year, took place shortly before my arrival.

The child was seated on a throne in the courtyard, red robes and yellow cassock upon him.

Alms, oblations, intonings, incense and the prostration of crowds installed him finally as father of the church.

Henceforth he is addressed, as are other Lamas, by the title of Mémé, (Grandfather).

Little Grandfather, just six years old! I wonder if he likes it?

. . . . . .

The calendar here must be a queer document.

Years run in a cycle of twelve and even then change their names.

Thus a man, answering as to his age, will reply :—

"I was born in the Iron-monkey year. It is two dozen and four years since then." Or, "It is three dozen years since I was born in the Fire-horse year."

The mathematical puzzle of it would doubtless be beyond me even if I could get more information, but here are a few of the names I have collected :— Iron-monkey, earth-hare, fire-tiger, earth-ox, iron-bird, fire-dog, earth-monkey, the snake, bull and sheep. Snake-year and sheep-year are in conflict with the bull-year. People born in those years are inimical to each other.

So far as I can make out, tigers, dogs, hares and other creatures follow each other in a succession of twelve, but even then change their quality, and next time of occurring become iron-dog or fire-monkey instead of being fire-dog or earth-monkey, though the proper order I do not know.

It is gnomish, eerie, but I cannot pretend to have fathomed it.

That, of course, adds to its fascination.

Who would not rather be born in the fire-tiger year than in that of the earth-snake ?

1500 *feet higher than Mont Blanc.*
The Kardong Pass, (17,574 *feet high*).
July 31*st.*

At six o'clock in the morning a long procession trailed after each other on ponies, mostly worse than better.

We went through the Gate of Virtue on the road to Yarkand, climbing steadily, leaving on our left the little monastery, above it the village and our fishing-stream. Up and up we mounted among stony hills.

We crossed a small cliff-enclosed desert, then wound up a path beside a mountain stream, tumbling down a crease in the gigantic slopes.

We left sterility. Where snow had lately lain the place was scattered with flowers. Barren hillsides, covered only with stones, showed where nature's night sheet had not lingered. Up on the steep bank above us, down in the gully, where the stream rushed and leapt, borage grew so dark a blue it was nearly black, while tender forget-me-nots threw out their brightest shades. Oxford and Cambridge met and mingled. Cow-parsley waved near small clumps of edelweiss. Yellow and white daisies, all more profuse as we mounted. Sedum and yellow Iceland poppies were there, primulas, asters, vetches and saxifrage; more thickly they clustered the higher we ascended, not that they were ever lost among grass and prolific growth, yet perhaps the more pleasing for pushing up courageous

heads on stony ground from otherwise bare earth; though here and there, rare as flowers, grass grew too. Even stinging nettles seemed things of beauty, green and gracious.

Heights above still looked inaccessible, while ponies, as well as we, lost breath so badly we had constantly to pause and wait for them to regain it.

There was a whistling by the running water, it might have been mistaken for a bird.

"Marmots!"

Down among the boulders two pretty creatures of browny-dust colour exactly matched earth and stones. We could not be certain of them until they moved.

Shrilly they whistled, seeming to mind us not at all.

Our upward path led at last to the opening of meeting passes below the final mountain peaks.

Too high for valley, not yet the col, I do not know how to describe the open space where water tumbled and mountain summits reared in differing directions. Something like a path coiled round the last leap of a mighty giant, where he thrust his peaks into the sky.

To the actual col between these peaks we were to climb to the pass over the summit that leads to far Yarkand.

And, as we gathered round three white spreads of table-cloth, hot tea and food, the first, long-expected caravan from Yarkand actually did descend the track.

Rarely could be seen a better show of yaks' tails. Not only were ours waiting to bear us up the pass, they were joined by comrades from Yarkand. Black

YARKANDI MERCHANTS IN THE SEREI, LEH.

or white, big and bunchy, they hung down luxuriously from the quiet beasts with big, spreading horns, huge shoulders, black shaggy skins and sleepy ways. Live and let live might be their motto, though if really roused they may turn into dangerous enemies.

The men from Yarkand were marked by the distinguished outline given by what for want of better word I call stylish clothes. Their coats, shorter than Thibetans, cut to the knee, fell away smartly from the front to lie out in skirted effect round the back. All wore high leather boots. Some had close caps, others wore a round, white felt hat with curling brim that, though slightly reminiscent of an old-fashioned clown, would doubtless be welcome at Trouville. Their faces were almost as pale as ours, deeply sunburnt it is true. I have seen English gypsies of darker tint.

The lads had a frank, open look and square chins.

"Are they honest?" the Resident asked his shikari.

"Honest? Who now is honest? Five years ago a bad wind blew. Since then all have lied and stolen. No one honest is left in the world."

My side-saddle was pitched upon a yak.

A gentle, swaying action replaced the sharper jog of pony.

Instead of bridle, a single rope, passed through his nostrils, turned back between his horns, was handed to me.

I hated to tug its nostrils, and scolded the men who dragged at them the full length of the rope with might and main. But the yaks lifted their

heads, and pulled their end as lustily as if it were bound about a hoof.

I found my yak answered even my timorous twitching, turning to right or left, rambling along with pleasant, easy motion.

A black and white eagle soared and swooped, indignant at this encroachment on his lone solitude. Sharp peaks cut an azure sky. The leg of a dead horse added a warning note to the desolation. Larks on slopes below had risen with glad notes, but did not spring from these more stony heights. Choughs and chats alighted from time to time. Edelweiss blossomed freely.

Heights above, shy, tender flowers afoot, great boulders, up and up, joy only impeded by shortened breath, the moment called for poetry. Full well I knew it, yet aught I could achieve was this :—

"O gentle Yak,
Upon thy back
I ramble free and gaily.
Perched on thy side,
A rope to guide,
Fain would I ride thee daily !

"But Herald, Yak,
And Mail, alack,
Will be my only Daily ;
While far from thee,
I'll wander free
'Tis true, but not so gaily ! "

That shortening breath ! Fish must know it when suddenly seized out of water, or we, when plunged in the ocean. Eyes seemed as if they

THE KARDONG PASS. (FIFTEEN HUNDRED FEET HIGHER THAN MONT BLANC.)

must crack from inward pressure. Teeth ached with blood swelling the gums. Symptoms familiar to Mount Everest and other explorers.

The final heap of piled stones most people climbed on their feet. I clung to my crutches and the yak. Nobly the creature mounted stone upon stone, hitched himself upward, jerk by jerk, trampling fresh heights beneath his sturdy hoofs.

One moment nothing but big stones, rocks, boulders, in bewildering mazes beneath, while one looked for ways, zig-zagging among them; a final step, the summit gained, wide worlds outspread, peaks, ranges, distances. . . .

To-day though, clouds, that had mercifully tempered the sun upon our backs, laid veils of mystery upon the far forest of peaks we had climbed to see, those distant lands, whose earth we could never hope to tread.

Still we were 1500 feet higher than Mont Blanc, and visible for miles was the twisting path, slowly descending between giant slopes that led to far Yarkand.

A big snow patch on the actual col offered pictorial advantages. We persuaded our yaks upon it, took snapshots of each other.

A couple of ravens with wild flight looped the loop against blue sky. One held something in his claw. Looking through field-glasses, a man announced it to be a morsel of muslin, a bit torn from a prayer-flag.

"Look at those piles of stones, how ridiculously they are heaped! Highland deer would certainly

mistake one for a twisted, old man crouching under a deer-stalker, the other for a jaunty tam-o'-shanter!"

"They are meant to look like men. An old fellow explained to me the other day that when a man has to come up these passes alone in winter, if the demon behind the wind can be prevailed upon to believe there are many of them, he may be frightened, but if there is only one he will take it out of him."

Pleasant, flower-strewn slopes under blue sky now; yet masses of whirling blackness, torn, riven by wind into clouds, screaming blasts, bearing long needles of ice, blinding snow, every step a pain, every stumble an agony, in this transfiguration of nature into malignant forces, the absurd knobbly, gnome-like little men of piled stones would bring comfort to the wayfarer, if only in the assurance of other human life. And they live in the belief of a direct Intelligence behind every Force.

The Dr Sahib, interested in altitude and statistics, took our pulses. His and mine were the quickest, 128. He had climbed on foot and his speedily fell to 113.

Force of gravitation and the hand of the shikari, placed like a bracelet round the upper part of my arm, balanced me on legs of which I had entirely lost control and brought me somehow in inebriate style off the ultimate summit. As soon as a track began occasionally to show, I used my last morsel of breath to call for my yak.

The patient beast stood below a high rock, I flopped upon his back, amid protests of danger at

mounting, determining to die suddenly with swift whirl rather than expire like a fish in odious gasps.

And rightly did I trust my yak!

In and out among the rocks, flop, flop, softly, firmly, he plodded downwards, ever hastening, leaving this one, passing that, until triumphantly he brought the eldest of the party safely back to tumbling stream and picnic baskets, long before anyone else arrived, most of them with hands full of flowers.

It was a heartsome ride downwards, rendered the more so for me by the kindly loan of Droma, who ambled gladly home, ever gaining levels where breath grew easier, chatting more pleasant.

Sense of achievement strongly upon us, not only height gained and survived, but thirty-two miles ridden in a day, gaily we descended the long, winding path, companioned by flowers and stream, crossed the little, isolated desert, passed the mediæval, perched village, surrounded by willow-trees, the ancient monastery among the lower corn-fields, gained the shadow of the great castle rock, went under the Gate of Virtue, threaded the bazaar with many a cheery, "*Joo*," amid chorus of, "*Joo-lay*," turned the last corner to the gushing little brook under stone wall and green field, gained the high grey steps, the trees, the garden, the lawn and the roses by the porch.

CHAPTER XXVII

From a letter to the Mem Sahib.
Srinagar. August 22nd, 1922.

It is over, the glorious, strenuous, eye-opening, exhausting, wonderful, all-the-way-learning-new-things time!

To-day I look over the most placid of beautiful views. It might be painted on china. A motor hoots, or did I dream it? No, there it goes again. A sleek motor on round, roly wheels.

Had extraordinary luck with ponies all the way down. One, it is true, fell down suddenly, (I fear we were both dreaming,) on an abrupt and stony path and hurled me over his head.

That was a lucky escape of Colonel B.'s. I met them at Nurla, had tea with them in the wood. You will have heard by now that his pony went clean over the khud, frightened by a landslide. He just got off in time. I hope his back is better?

God was good. Over fiercest deserts He always spread some clouds. Through the villages, roses were over, but yet more field flowers bloomed. Most lovable of all, the big, blue crane's bill, the wild geranium. It rose in frothy frills on the edge

of green corn, delicate and light, large and veined like salpiglossis.

And is it lavender ?

Out of all the earlier stone walls it sprouted, deep, dark bands of rich blue. A soft flower, spread into tiny circles at intervals up a long, thin stem, the leaf much more leafy than anything we call lavender. But the sweet, stuffy scent . . . Or can it be cat-mint ? Nepeta ?

Blue it was against grey stone walls, while beneath, silver water tinkled, God-given, after stony deserts.

Butterflies had arrived.

Several Painted Ladies appeared and innumerable little Garden Whites chased each other above the flowers. A butterfly, too, with dull black wings, edged with white. Two or three brown Fritillary hovered, and once I saw a flight of little ones, golden-brown, but that was after Kargil.

Constantly we were intrigued by two shaggy, soft mauve flowers, beginning almost at once.

One we knew for a thistle. The other looked first like a bright mauve ragged robin, but do you know I think it was dandelion ? I meant to taste its forked leaves. Edelweiss . . . but we gathered them in hundreds. The field where we camped at Bod Karbu was covered by them. In Little Thibet they were fat and stumpy.

On the high desert beyond Lamayuru, a stony-sandy slope at a slant on which no man could stand, was marked all over with fresh hieroglyphics. These

were the trails of mountain sheep. It made one realize what the sportsmen go through to climb after them.

At Mulbek, under the high rock monastery, it came between me and my sleep, the horrid thought that I was coming away, leaving the widest spaces in the world, the highest hills, women wearing turquoise *paraghs*, men in pig-tails, chortans, monasteries, prayer-walls and little luck-flags. Why live in a dull world without a fluttering luck-flag on a twisty twig ?

Eyes grown accustomed, all might look less goblin and eerie on the return.

Far from it ; they grew more so.

Queen Victoria resembled herself on both sides of the rock. As for that queer heap at Mulbek, likened to baker's loaves, I turned the corner of a gorge and there it was,—a gigantic, laughing, head-on-one-side, cap-tilted old nurse, a child at her knee, gazing up in her face.

They don't even stay the same, these weird rocks !

Away beneath her feet was that odd cluster of climbing, flat-roofed houses.

I cannot bear to leave it, chortans and Chumba and the people, odd, unexpected, cheery, queer as their landscapes. Still in lama-land, meeting yaks, bulging with packs, coming over the bridge of a little stream, I turned my pony aside, up a deep gully.

There, on a tall cliff, upreared a fantastic town under the lea of yet higher upstanding rocks.

Scribbling down a sketch, while the yaks lumbered past, I asked my Thibetan boy its name.

" Henarsku," he replied.

But now, writing this letter, I show him the sketch and the name, and he knows nothing about it.

Unexpectedly as it burst forth in its loveliness it disappears.

Yet living men and women may be leading lives up there on that lonesome crag, exciting and important to them as those of our world-known politicians.

At Kargil the Tesildar fed us again, a delicious, little morning repast of nuts, almond paste and mounds of ripe apricots. Forgot to say how good they were in the mission-garden at Khalatze, hanging in golden clusters over our tents. We shook the trees and down they tumbled.

He also found us some first-rate ponies.

Khud sense left me. I was completely callous, and never wanted to get off for bridges. They seemed good, broad and substantial; but it appears ponies prefer rails and sometimes jibbed until led across.

Tell little Helen I missed my fellow horse-woman and did not name the ponies at all. Tell her multitudes of lizards were all along the paths with orange streaks down their backs. They scuttled away as fast as they could from the horrid sight of Auntie Helen Mary. The more frightened they were, the higher they lifted their little tails.

Women, with long sticks, standing high from

baskets on their backs, pressed to the rock side to let me pass on a khud near Kargil.

One must have turned quickly to see the queer sight of a white face and solar topee. The top of her sticks ran through my veil and caught me like a fish. She bore off lovely bits of luck-flags on her twigs.

Things altered after Kargil. The juniper grew. Flowers changed. Trees, but above all grass, became more frequent.

Here we first met balsam. I had no idea it was so brilliant, so frail, so "conservatory" a flower, especially in rosy pink with a round O, marked darkly, of a wondering mouth. Lower down we met it yellow, a far more ordinary affair.

How wise you were to tell us to camp in those two, adorable, green grass woods! Little leaves twittered in the midst of stony, barren hills, water rippled. About five o'clock mountains, high as walls, hid off hot sun. And the stars . . . but no, just once I have lived it.

Do you remember the fluffy-leaved, yellow flowering plant I mistook for young carrot?

It spread all over the valley beyond Dras, three feet high, the leaves had turned golden-brown like pale bracken. Men, but above all women, deep amongst it, rosy-brown as gypsies in close caps and dangling silver ornaments, were gleaning big bundles and making stacks, fodder probably or even fuel for the winter. Pretty as pictures they looked, the golden-brown tangle up to their thighs.

Once a graceful creature turned a corner alone. Shapely legs clearly outlined in tight-fitting leggings, she came springing down the hillside. I dropped my eyes for a moment to my reins, lifted them. Down had come her petticoats; and as she neared me I saw she was quite an old woman.

The purity, the grandeur of Mattayan struck afresh. Immense mountains sloped so that gracious sides were clothed in green, soothing to sun-baked eyes.

Just there, in the sweet grass, it seemed right to find snowy stars of Grass of Parnassus, purest of all earthly flowers.

More opulent blossoms waited for less silent pastures.

As for the Zoji, I cannot think, and am glad to forget who it was said that on coming down we would find it hard to believe we ever had suffered.

Of course without a speck of snow, just two dust-laden bridges of it, flowers spread as in fields of Paradise, larks singing, broad paths, even if wickedly jagged in places, conditions were entirely changed. All was gladness, rising even to joy. Yet but small imagination could perceive the peril, far worse than realized, of these paths, snow-lost.

One of them is actually a khud. A step off. . . . I shudder to think of that balancing cot . . . and the raging river beneath it.

Soft heaps of snow cajoled one into believing that slopes were fairly even, except for those humps up and down which Paghspa dragged the unwilling Mr Brown and me.

I must confess none of them look quite so abrupt as in the sketch for my book, but that is how it felt, and one thing is certain, that picture must climb the cover, just as surely as we had to climb the Zoji.

It is an odd sensation,—you have got to go on or die if you don't.

We dawdled purposely. One does not spend every day in heaven. Mrs Starr counted over seventy different kinds of flowers. They mingled colours in exquisite tangles. Sometimes one hue would predominate for big patches. A flower, quite new to me, painted the hillside a rich crimson-purple tint. It reminded one of cottage gardens, and is called pedicularis.

Once it streaked a long, flat meadow, while on green slope above, forget-me-nots made a splash of rich, heavenly, fading blue. Grey peaks above cut into paler blue sky.

My Thibetan boy plucked a queer, taggy flower, black and yellow with pointed leaves.

Old friends were there, almost every flower one knew and the missing scabious, tall and handsome on long stems, great cushions of pale primrose.

We loitered down the enormous cliffs of that terrific gorge. Hundreds of pack-ponies, yaks and zos ascended slowly in procession. Trade-routes were open at last.

Far below, sheer beneath our feet, lay pine trees and grass, soft atmosphere, cloud-flecked solitary peaks of lovely Kashmir.

Baltistan was behind us. Sterile lands were left.

. . . . . .

Our energetic friends romped on with double marches, but when my tent was up at Sonamarg, on grass at the edge of a pine wood, dropping to a rushing, snow-white river, I decided to stay two whole days, writing the final words of this book under the shade of a big fir-tree.

We had penetrated to the far side of the Marg and were under mighty peaks and glaciers.

Up pegs for the last time and on again !

The world is amusingly full of surprises. Rarely do they fail us.

I had looked forward to that deep and rocky dell, but found it a path of miniature Alpine summits, the dry bed of a rocky cascade.

" Water make this. Rains," the Thibetan boy explained.

No such evil path was encountered through all the wild, lone trails of Baltistan and Little Thibet.

It took two hours to do four miles. Luckily I had the best of keen, little, chestnut ponies. We did the next ten in less than two hours, arriving at Gund before dark.

Not the only surprise. I had dreaded the heat of the last march into Ganderbal and rose betimes.

Slightly overcast sky, wind in the face, willows and great walnut trees, water rippling all the way, wee streams in green beds, made these perhaps the sweetest miles of all.

You cannot think, yes, you can, you know these things, what it was to sit on grass under the deep shade of Chinar trees, the last twelve miles completed by 9.30, while my waiting boatman fetched me, for a mere few annas, no more trouble than that! a handful of fruit, a loaf of white bread. Civilization was reached once more.

Never again may I be obliged to get up at four in the morning. And do you know (indeed you do!) that the world has surprises at those hours it never divulges later?

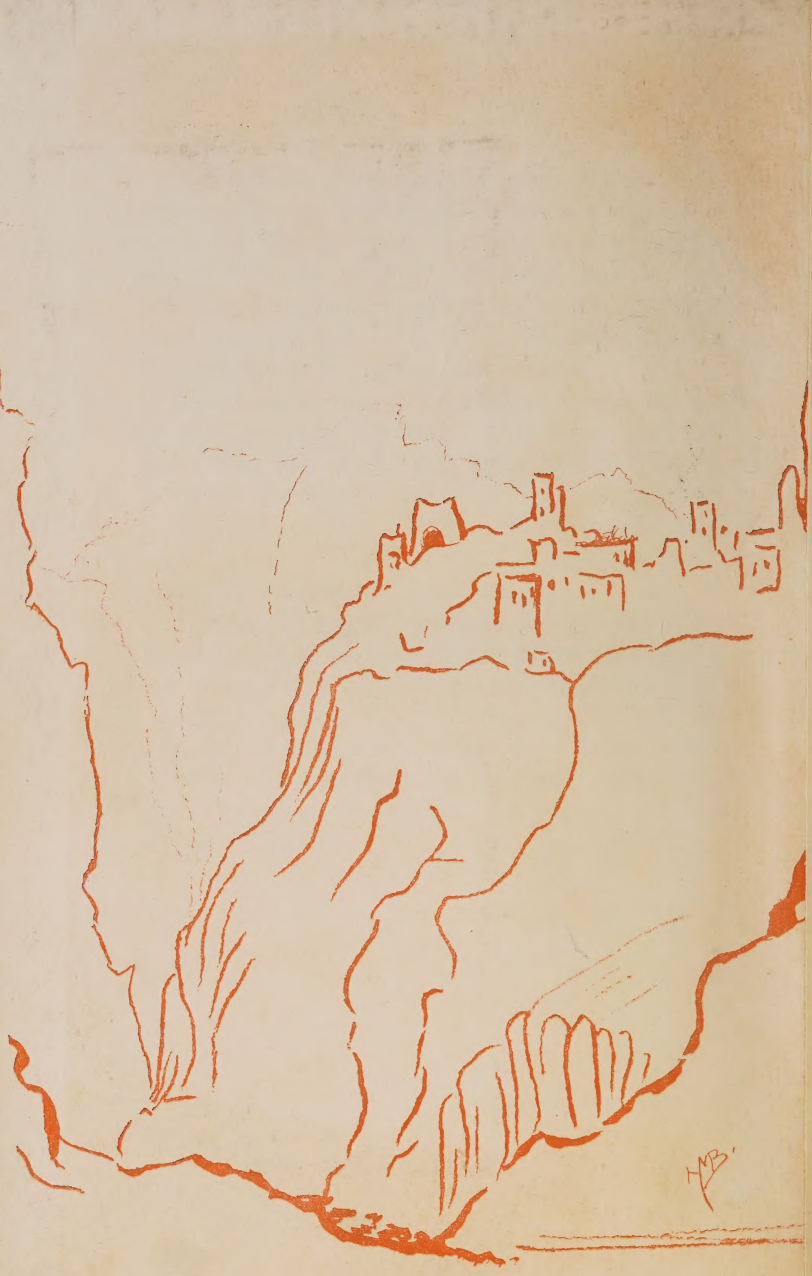
The pack-ponies arrived. The very last "*Joos*" and "*Joo-lays*" were uttered between me and dust-coloured pony-men from Dras.

I stepped on cushions beneath curtains of a little boat, lay back rapturously, henceforward to be idly borne over this planet's spaces and waters.

And they bore me away among the holy beauty, the exquisite mystery of flowering lotus blossom.

That was a devout and righteous man who knew the Presence of God in the lotus,—*Aum Mani Padme Hun!*

Srinagar. August 22nd, 1922.



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